

OF OCCUPATION AND RESISTANCE

Writings from
K A S H M I R

Profound and poignant, this compilation is a defiant attempt at remembering in a Valley where setting down the past – in writing, or photographs, in lyrics or on a canvas, even whispered over a burning hearth while all around you are sipping tea – is the only insurance that what has gone before will always be known. So I raise my cup: Here's to not forgetting.

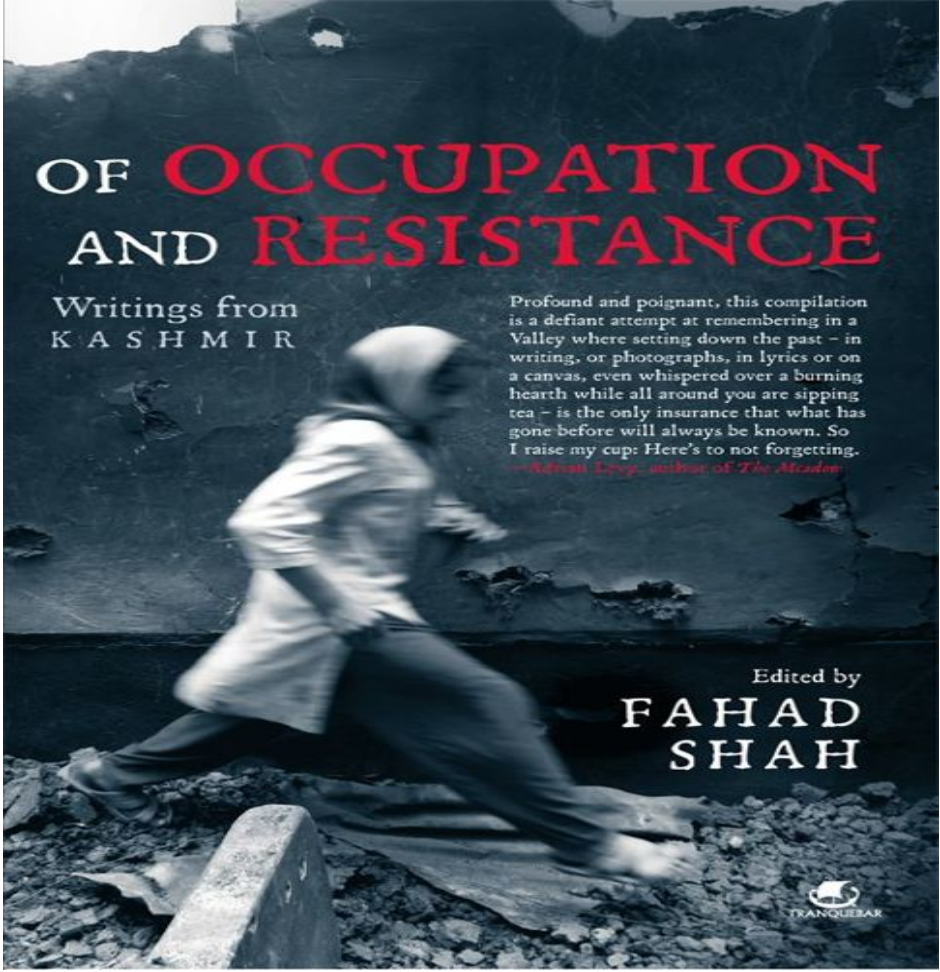
—Adrian Lyne, author of *The Aviator*

Edited by

FAHAD
SHAH



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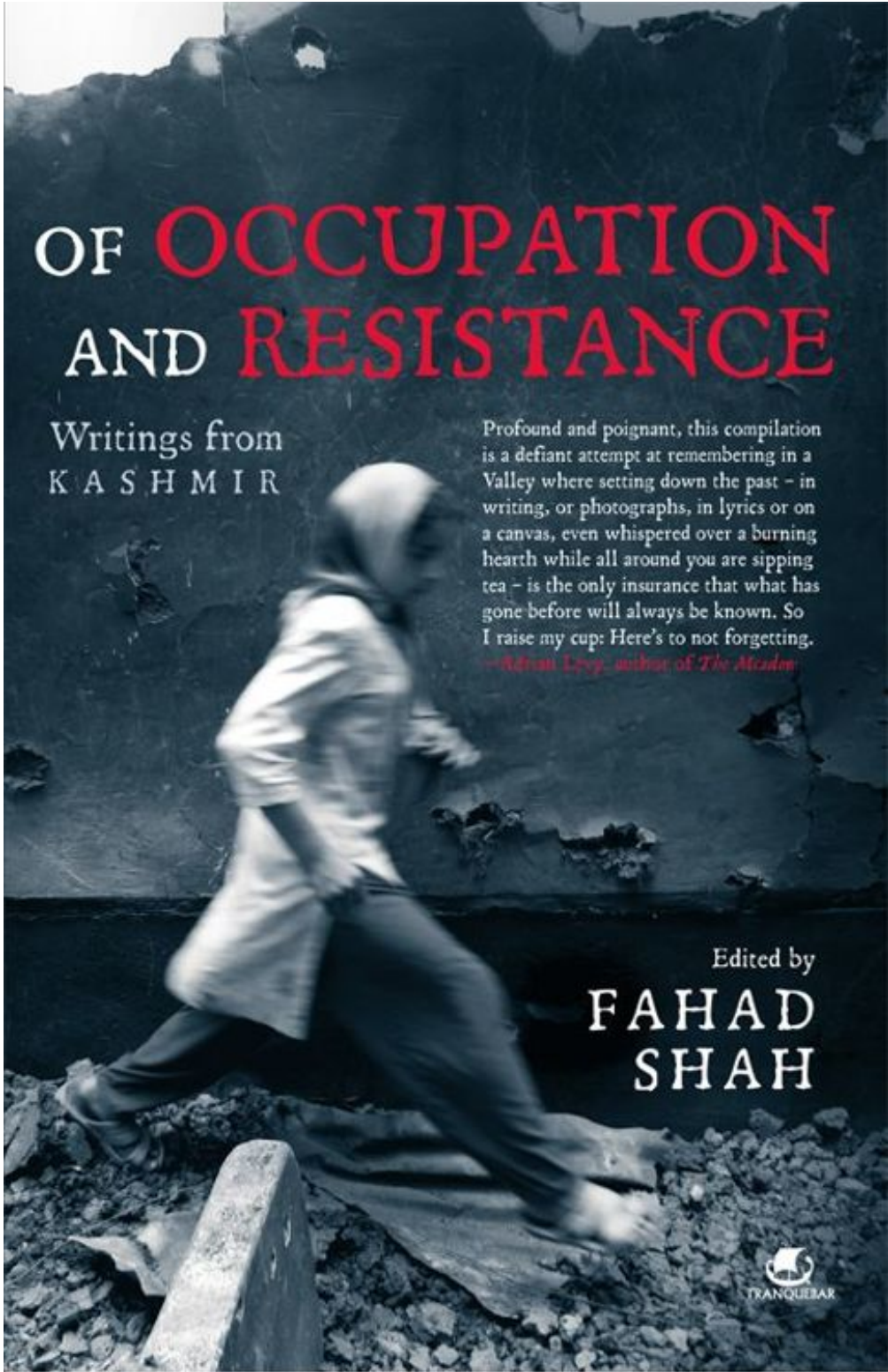
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—Adrian Levy, author of *The Alchemist*

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—Adrian Levy, author of *The Meadon*

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FAHAD SHAH was born in Kashmir. He studied journalism and worked as reporter, covering the Kashmir conflict. He was selected as a finalist for the Manthan South Asia Award 2011 for his contribution to the profession. He is the founder-editor of *The Kashmir walla* magazine, which has been described as ‘an insider’s storybook of life in Kashmir’ by *Al-Jazeera*. Shah has written for various national and international publications including *The Christian Science Monitor*, *First Post*, *Tehelka*, *Hardnews* and *Socialist Worker*.

Of Occupation and Resistance: Writings from Kashmir

Edited by Fahad Shah



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Acknowledgements

The memory of oppressed people is one thing that cannot be taken away, and for such people, with such memories revolt is always an inch below the surface.

– **Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492 to Present***

Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness – and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe.

– **Arundhati Roy, *War Talk***

Blood Will Be Avenged: An Introduction

*Speak up, for your lips are not sealed
And your words are still your own.
This straight body is yours,
Speak while your soul is still your
own.*

– Faiz Ahmed Faiz

Khoon ka badla June mein lengey. Blood will be avenged in June. This was the slogan resonating in Kashmir in the early months of 2011, after a year of bloodshed.

June 2011 arrived and the Valley was calm, unlike the June of the previous year. The state government claimed that Kashmir was peaceful. It wasn't. On 11 June 2011, on the first death anniversary of a 17-year-old student, Tufail Mattoo, Kashmir was placed under strict curfew. Pro-resistance groups had called for a strike on that day in remembrance of the 2010 victims of the bullets of the police and Indian forces.

Tufail had been killed in 2010 by a tear gas shell fired by a policeman, which broke his skull open and splattered his brains across the playground. His death triggered continuous mass protests followed by civilian killings, one person a day on an average. More than 120 people, mostly school-going teenagers, were killed by bullets, tear gas shells and torture in police stations.

In the 2008 civil uprising, during the mass protests against the Amarnath land row, more than 80 people were killed in a few months. Justice has not been delivered in any of these killings. The civil uprising however was viewed as being successful; 800 *kanals* of land – earlier transferred to the Amarnath Shrine Board – were returned to the government, despite protests organised by Hindu right wing groups against the revocation order. The then state government, the Congress–People's

Democratic Party, also had to step down, paving way for governor's rule. That is, until subsequent assembly elections in 2008, which brought the National Conference–Congress government in power under the chief ministership of Omar Abdullah.

The Amarnath land revocation order was celebrated, but the 2008 civil uprising resistance movement had successfully established the shift from the older to the younger generation. It sent a message from Kashmir to the world that the resistance had not died. Instead, the legacy had passed on. At an informal gathering, while discussing the 2008 civil uprising, a former militant commander said, 'Today we are seeing the beans we sowed giving fruits. It makes us happy that our sacrifices have not failed... and the movement is taken over by our youth.'

After a certain point of time the revocation of the land transfer order became irrelevant and the streets were filled pushing for larger demands – for a secession from India.



Since the 2008 civil uprising, the world has seen the new face of Kashmir's resistance movement. It has taken two decades to reach this point.

In the late 80s, an armed movement was started by passionate groups of youth, following the revolutionary principles of many ideologues of the freedom movement. Maqbool Butt was one of the revolutionaries. Butt was hanged by India in Tihar jail on 11 February 1984. He has been one of the guiding forces ever since. The armed movement continued for years and every day people would be buried; martyrs' graveyards were filled; playing fields turned into cemeteries.¹

In Kashmir, over several decades, people have struggled politically, and through armed uprisings. In the recent past, we have seen a spate of stone throwing by youths as young as 10 years of age, in every corner of the valley.² These acts of rebellion have played a significant role in Kashmir's history, but it is a new wave of resistance that has pierced through every wall of oppression – protest through music, art, literature and social networking sites. Such forms of dissent have great reach, are viable, attract people and make them curious about the cause. In 2010, a new name was heard everywhere – MC Kash, a 22-year-old boy who gave Kashmir's new movement an anthem: *I Protest (Remembrance)*. Within a few weeks his

name was in international and Indian newspapers and on television news channels. It was a new development in Kashmir's history of resistance. There had been no resistance rap songs till then. Most of the people didn't know what rap was. MC Kash was accepted with excitement and passion as his voice and words were about loss and standing collectively against the occupation of Kashmir. His music turned viral. Since then MC Kash has released around 20 songs, each explaining a certain chapter in Kashmir's history of struggles. This is a type of resistance through art. Following in his footsteps, many rappers have emerged from Kashmir in the last two years.

Other forms of music too have gained in prominence. A song, which explains what happened in January 1990, hummed by the Children of Conflict, brings the inhabitants of the Valley closer to their roots. Terms such as *Kashmir July 13*, *Torture in Kashmir* or *Gawkadal Massacre*, trending on the internet, help build awareness.³

The emergence of alternative resistance movements can be traced back to an overriding fact – free speech has been crushed. Actually, 'crushed' is an understatement; in Kashmir, freedom of speech has been made a crime. The media is gagged. Local cable news channels are banned. Journalists on the ground are barred from reporting the truth, from writing about the killings, the torture, the spate of curfews. Many journalists have been ruthlessly beaten up in broad daylight and a few have also been detained. Alternate media therefore has had to come to the rescue.⁴

This is seen most compellingly through street art. Across Kashmir, on the walls of houses or shop-shutters, vibrant messages are seen. The universal slogan, found on almost every street, across the Valley is: 'Go India Go Back'. Some of these missives can still be found but most of them have been defaced by the Indian government. An underground graffiti artist told me during a meeting in the Kashmir University campus that he started engaging with graffiti when he saw what India was doing to Kashmir.⁵

Social media has fuelled most modern revolutions, including the Arab Spring. Kashmir's ruling regime too has realised its power, and has feared it. On 10 April 2012, a student of Kashmir University, Faraz Yaseen was arrested by the police when he was at his maternal home. Earlier during the day his father had received a phone call asking him to come to the Rainawari police station at 9:30 pm. From there his father accompanied a

police officer (a deputy superintendent in a special operations group) to his maternal home. At 10:30 pm, Faraz was taken to the Safa Kadal police station (in the downtown area) and his laptop and cell phone were seized. (The police returned them to him four months after he was arrested and released.) At 2 am he was released after questioning and was told to come the next day to Cargo (where the cyber cell police station in Srinagar is located). He was released after a few days of continuous questioning involving physical and psychological torture.

After Faraz's release, when I called a police officer at Cargo, he told me that Faraz had not been arrested. 'He was only called there and was provided counselling,' the officer said, on the condition of anonymity.

On release, Faraz tried recovering a normal life. I met him at this point. He recalled what he had been told by the police officers in the police station. 'A police officer asked me, "Why do you pursue these childish activities on Facebook? It won't benefit you. You know the 1989 armed uprising failed; 2008, 2010 – all the uprisings brought no good to Kashmiris. Then why do you think being pro-freedom on Facebook will get you anything? Go secure your career. If you want to study abroad we will help you." They stripped me naked and beat me up,' Faraz said.

This is how terrified the state is when youngsters express their views on the internet. Faraz said that to induce a change in perception, police officers told him that government and politics were disconnected from religion. 'They told me that Islam is just a religion of prayers, with rituals like Ramzan and Hajj. They also maligned the image of resistance leaders by telling me concocted stories about them. One of the officers was adamant about proving that being pro-establishment could yield results. He claimed one could join the mainstream, the KAS (Kashmir Administrative Services), IAS (Indian Administrative Services) etc.' Faraz was also asked to name the person who had run a campaign for the release of another young man, Waqar; Faraz pleaded he was unaware.

A number of young men, who were arrested, were released with the help of effective online crusades. Waqar Ahmed Moharkant, a 21-year-old student was in jail for more than 8 months. He was arrested for stone throwing and waging war against the state. A widespread campaign was launched by his friends and family. A website, 'Freewaqaar.org' was created to raise awareness about his arrest and it brought Amnesty International's attention to the case. As a consequence, Waqar was freed on 13 July 2012.⁶

Earlier on 7 February 2011, 14-year-old Faizan Rafiq Hakeem was arrested outside his home in the Reshi bazaar locality of Islamabad town and was later booked under the draconian Public Safety Act (PSA) for allegedly being involved with stone throwing. An extensive 'Free Faizan Campaign' was launched on social networking sites, which forced the government to free him on 5 April 2011. Faizan had spent almost two months in jail, despite being a minor.⁷



The curbs on freedom of speech in Kashmir and the indifference to local requests and demands have led to the emergence of several rap singers (or learners of rap), underground graffiti artists, painters, writers, photographers and filmmakers. There are websites and blogs that express the realities within Kashmir, or narrate brutal tales from the conflict. We therefore witness the rise of independent voices.

This has only led to more extreme crackdowns by the government. In November 2011, during the protests in Srinagar after Friday prayers, four journalists were beaten up by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and local policemen. Umar Mehraj (*Associated Press*), Showkat Shafi (a freelancer with *Al-Jazeera*), Yawar Kabli (*Getty Images* and *Kashmirdispatch.com*) and Shahid Tantray (*Dainik Bhaskar*) were assaulted. Mehraj said that the forces were shouting, 'Uthao, uthao video ab (now try and take a video),' and his camera was broken.⁸

Shahid Tantray was arrested by the police. He says, 'I was taken to the Nowhatta police station. The SHO (Station House Officer) Iqbal Shah started abusing me and said, 'Let me take you and then you will click pictures of children.' Everyone was beating me up and I was bleeding. My camera and lenses were broken. It was around 4 pm. I was handcuffed and put in the lock-up. At 8:30 pm I was taken to the police control room to treat my injuries, then back to the police station lockup and at 10:30 pm I was released.'

The police officer hinted at children because of an incident that had taken place on 1 November 2011. Shahid had captured on camera policemen taking away five boys in handcuffs in a local court. His pictures turned viral and were published in almost every newspaper the next day.

The Jammu and Kashmir government had earlier officially maintained that no minor boys had been arrested or kept in police custody.

Five days before these pictures appeared, the State Cabinet had approved of the amendments to the PSA, making 18 the minimum age for arrest. Yet the six minor boys were picked up for allegedly throwing stones. An Indian daily reported that the judge at the local court told the policeman who brought these boys to remove their handcuffs. He asked him their age as it was not mentioned in the remand application. ‘*Janab* (Sir), I guess their age is somewhere between 15 and 18,’ the policeman said. ‘Could you write their age on the paper? I want to check if your guess is right,’ the judge replied. On their way out, Burhan Nazir, a class seven student, said: ‘We were severely beaten by the police.’ As he was being dragged into the police vehicle, he shouted: ‘They (policemen) abused my sisters, my mother. She died long ago.’⁹

Shahid went on to recall, ‘After my release my family took me to the bone and joint hospital in Barzulla and the doctors found my neck and ankle bones fractured. I remained bedridden for next 25 days.’

The legendary philosopher Karl Marx, on 15 May 1842, wrote in the *Rheinische Zeitung* – a pro-democracy reformist publication of which Marx was later editor – that if the censorship is *honest* in its intention, it would prevent arbitrariness, but it makes arbitrariness into a law. He said:

No danger that it can avert is greater than itself. The mortal danger for every being lies in losing itself. Hence lack of freedom is the real mortal danger for mankind. For the time being, leaving aside the moral consequences, bear in mind that you cannot enjoy the advantages of a free press without putting up with its inconveniences. You cannot pluck the rose without its thorns! And what do you lose with a free press?

Marx said that the free press is the ubiquitous vigilant eye of a people’s soul, the embodiment of a people’s faith in itself, the eloquent link that connects the individual with the state and the world, the embodied culture that transforms material struggles into intellectual struggles and idealises their crude material form. He argued that it is a people’s frank confession to itself – and the redeeming power of confession is well known. It is the spiritual mirror in which a people can see itself, and self-examination is the first condition of wisdom.¹⁰

In Kashmir, however, the state neither allows for ‘frank confession’ nor makes space for a ‘spiritual mirror in which a people can see itself’.

The Indian forces will not permit free press in the Valley.¹¹ The brutal repression of the demand for rights always leads to a tragedy. Such calamities and losses have been faced by almost anyone who has tried to unearth the truth; dissenters have inevitably faced the wrath of the government forces. Those who are aligned with alternative media to narrate Kashmir's stories have been either threatened or banned. Even rap singers have come under fire; the studios they record their songs in have been raided by the police. MC Kash talks about this in the article, 'Raiding My Studio Was Like Cutting My Throat'.¹² Rappers are told to show the lyrics of their songs to government authorities before they can record. Whosoever asks for justice is viewed as a threat. Sadly, the daily threats faced by the people of Kashmir at the hands of the Indian forces or the local police – slaughter, beatings, arrests or enforced disappearances – get suppressed.



On 27 June 2012, two days after the 240-year-old Dastageer Sahib Shrine in Srinagar was gutted, the then home minister of India, P Chidambaram said that in 2011 Kashmir had seen the lowest incidence of violence in 20 years. 2012, in his view, had seen less violence than 2011. He was addressing a press conference in Thiruvananthapuram. The word he used was 'violence', which in the Valley means pro-freedom protests. The Indian government terms every protest as *violence*. When youngsters were protesting across the Valley in 2010, the state police maintained that they were misguided, jobless drug addicts; they failed to acknowledge the fact that they were boys and girls demanding their genuine rights.¹³

2011 was by no means a peaceful year. As per the report, 'Human Rights Review: Jammu and Kashmir-2011', prepared by the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, 233 people lost their lives in the state, including 56 civilians, 100 alleged militants, 71 armed forces personnel and 6 unidentified persons and counter-insurgent renegades. The report stated, 'Out of the total 56 civilians killed this year, 11 were students, amongst whom 7 were minors. The killed civilians include six women also.'

The state or central government has not acknowledged these reports.¹⁴ It was in 2011, for the first time, that a state institution like State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) endorsed the findings of the International People's Tribunal for Human Rights and Justice in Kashmir (IPTK)

regarding the presence of unmarked or mass graves in North Kashmir. A report titled 'Buried Evidence' was released by the group in December 2009, which documented 2,700 unknown, unmarked or mass graves, containing more than 2,943 bodies, across 55 villages in the Bandipora, Varmul and Kupwara districts of Kashmir. So far, the group, in total, has exposed the presence of 6,217 unmarked or mass graves in five districts – Kupwara, Varmul, Bandipora, Poonch and Rajouri.¹⁵

According to the home minister, 2012 was peaceful, quieter than 2011. On the day of the home minister's claim that Kashmir was calm, the Valley was witnessing the third day of a curfew. There were strict restrictions, there were parallel protests, and a tense situation prevailed. The protests had erupted soon after the Dastageer Sahib Shrine had been gutted in a mysterious fire that had erupted on its rooftop. People had come out to the roads expressing anger and grief over the loss of this revered spiritual place.

In a conflict, cultural symbols or religious artefacts have sentimental value. A shrine, which is more than two centuries old and is architecturally compelling, is not merely an object of beauty. It comes to represent the depth of a people's spiritual faith and the glorious history of a land.

At first the protests conveyed the Valley's anger at the gutting of the shrine. But within a few hours the demonstrations changed in shape. People started shouting slogans against Indian rule. There were many incidents of stone throwing around the Valley.

In Kashmir, every protest – even if it is against the widening of a road or about the lack of drinking water – turns into a demand for Kashmir's secession from India. And whosoever comes to the streets to fight knows that being hit by a bullet or a tear gas shell or by a policeman's baton is a possibility. Nevertheless, people do protest. And oftentimes someone gets killed or badly injured.¹⁶

For decades now, India has been undermining these protests and the voices of dissent emerging from Kashmir. India has not only failed to win over Kashmir, but it is also close to impossible that they will ever in future. There are numerous reasons why India lost Kashmir to Kashmir's resistance movement – chief amongst them being the Indian government's unresponsiveness to the genuine demand of the right to self-determination or *azadi* (independence) by the people of the Valley, and the ruthless nature of Indian occupation.¹⁷ With a few exceptions (in the case of those who

benefitted from India's presence in Kashmir), the vast majority of the voices from Kashmir assert that they don't want to be under Indian rule. Whether they decide to merge with Pakistan or stay independent is beside the point; their first priority has always been to overthrow Indian rule.¹⁸ This has, at all times, been evident; if only the government would open its eyes and ears and see and hear what the Kashmiris are telling it!

The Indian government's response, all along, has been brutality, injustice, apathy and denial. There are thousands of cases pending and fake encounters continue. Dissent voices are crushed. Gatherings are banned. The right to protest has been taken away. There are draconian laws like PSA and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). Both have been widely used to jail and kill civilians with impunity. Minors have been arrested and put in jails under PSA.¹⁹

The militancy movement, which was a war against the Indian forces, was indigenous and sustained because of the support of the people. The militants were, and are, seen as saviours who have earned their honour. During the height of militancy, when the Indian army barged into houses, Kashmiris were terrified that they would be viewed as being sympathisers of the Indian forces. But if militants visited a Kashmiri's house, he knew it would attract the wrath of only a few people, those loyal to the Indian forces in the neighbourhood.

Kashmir's most tense area, Sopore was (or perhaps still is) seen as a hub of militancy. The locals have been loyal to the militants. There have been innumerable incidents in Sopore, where militants have lobbed rocket grenades, a dozen at a time, at police stations and disappeared. After the attacks, they have been untraceable. How can they vanish? It's because Sopore had no informers; hardly anyone chooses to speak to the Indian forces.

As things stand now, young men are still joining the militant ranks, but the numbers have dwindled. In July 2012, an Indian national daily reported that the number of Kashmiri men to have taken up the gun in the past year was a little over 40, including those who lost their near ones in the 2008 and 2010 violence. 'Most of them are in their late teens or early 20s. Recently, the state police claimed to have busted a Lashkar module in Sopore by arresting seven militants, all of whom were in their early 20s,' the newspaper reported.²⁰

It has taken Indian forces years to build a strong base in the town of Sopore and its villages. Today the Indian contingent is stronger than it once was and we see changing conditions. The forces have tried to choke militarisation by collaborating with vulnerable sections. A section of informers has evolved in Kashmir, and with counter-insurgency strategies, the Indian forces have managed to kill some top militants in Sopore and elsewhere.



From 1846 to 1947, Kashmir was ruled by the Dogras. It was a 101-year-old regime. The rule of the Dogras was brutal, especially for the Muslims, what with high taxes, a ban on religious gatherings, and discrimination against those following Islam. In 1931, the Muslims started a movement against the Dogras; the revolt was successful to a large extent, and inequity and bigotry declined. But power failed to get transferred from the Dogras to the Kashmiris.

During the partition of British India, Jammu and Kashmir remained a disputed area, as it was claimed by both India and Pakistan. Though it was decided that a plebiscite – the right to choose between India and Pakistan – would be granted to every princely state, such a referendum did not occur in Jammu and Kashmir (even though it was a princely state).²¹

Renowned historian and an expert on South Asia, Mridu Rai writes in her book, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir* about the unredeemed pledge made on behalf of the Indian nation by Jawaharlal Nehru in November 1947 to consult, through a referendum, the Kashmiri people on the state's accession to the Indian union. Rai says:

When this (referendum) failed to materialise, Abdullah's advocacy of independence for Kashmir from the Indian and Pakistani states alike led to his being thrown behind bars by Nehru's government in 1953. He was in and out of jail until 1972 and remained out of power until 1975 while the Congress Party-led governments in Delhi made their separate arrangements with successors handpicked by them. For over three decades, in return for their endorsement of Kashmir's accession, these selected politicians received the most generous grants-in-aid disbursed by the Indian centre to any state. The ritual of elections was performed regularly enough, yet as most Kashmiris assert today, except for those held in 1977 and 1983 not one of them was fair and free from manipulation. The unrepresentative leaders they threw up funnelled Delhi's monetary boons into strengthening their own limited patronage networks rather than in alleviating the plight of the people they were meant to serve.²²

The people of this Valley of tragedies were never given a right to choose what they wanted. Kashmir has remained divided between India, Pakistan and China since the 1940s and the whole of it is claimed by both India and Pakistan. For all these decades, the people of Kashmir have been demanding their right to self-determination.

To secure this right, Kashmir has been battling rough times. There are always two versions to any incident within the Valley – one comes from India and the other is from the people who live in Kashmir. India claims that the people of the Valley want to settle down in peace; the local or national voting percentage is viewed as the general population's support to India. However, it is clearly mentioned in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 91, dated 30 March 1951, that it would not consider elections held only in Indian-controlled Kashmir to be a substitute for a free and impartial plebiscite including the people of the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir. There are problems in the Pakistani side of Kashmir too, but we hardly get to hear much about them. However, all told, the circumstances there are much better than the situation in this part of Kashmir.



24 years ago, a blast rocked the Kashmir Valley for the first time in March 1988, at the Central Telegraph Office in the summer capital, Srinagar. The blast grabbed the global media's attention and marked the beginning of armed resistance. Until then people had been politically resisting the events that had taken place in 1947 – the landing of Indian and Pakistani troops, the 'conditional accession', and the broken promises that followed soon after.

The blast was the start of an era, a new chapter in the history of this disputed land. Before the blast, young men had been crossing over to Pakistan-administered Kashmir to return as trained militants. While talking about his first meeting with the first commander-in-chief of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) Ashfaq Majeed Wani, a former senior militant of the outfit, on the condition of anonymity, says: 'I met Ashfaq in the central jail in the late 80s and he was very strong, both physically and ideologically. I told him that the political struggle of decades has failed. We have to start armed rebellion against India. I told him to meet me after his release, which he did. Then he, along with the others, crossed the Line of

Control (LoC) for arms training.’ Young men like Ashfaq returned with renewed zeal to fight Indian troops in Kashmir. Every city and village was influenced by the militants. Ashfaq was killed a few years later in Srinagar.

In the early 1990s, thousands were killed, including civilians who had been fighting for their rights or sympathising with the resistance movement. In 1989, when journalist Kuldip Nayar visited Kashmir on behalf of the Indian government to assess the situation, he met the People’s Conference leader, Abdul Ghani Lone in Srinagar’s Broadway Hotel. He wrote about this meeting in his book, *Beyond the Lines*:

I told (Abdul Ghani) Lone that New Delhi might be willing to have a dialogue with ‘the boys’, and his view was that India should first re-establish its authority in Kashmir because its writ did not run there. What should Delhi do? I asked him. ‘You will have to kill at least 20,000 people before you can establish your authority’... Lone proved to be correct. His figure was 20,000 but twice that number were killed.²³

After this policy of continuous killings, Kashmir had become a war zone. According to Nayar, India opened torture centres from where hardly anyone returned alive. He writes:

Kashmiri leaders, including Lone, were detained without trial. That was when the torture chambers, called Papa One and Papa Two, were established. Apparently they were interrogation centres where indescribable cruelties were committed... If ever the history of *zulum* by the security forces is recorded, the interrogation centres in Kashmir will rank quite high up the ladder.²⁴

Millions of people came out on to the streets and open grounds to hold demonstrations and demand secession from India, to ask for azadi. During the early years of militancy, Kashmiri Hindus called Pandits left the Valley (their homeland) and went to Jammu (a part of the state). Their migration from one region to another came to be witnessed after more than 200 of them were killed by militants and unidentified gunmen, and also, due to the facilitation by the then governor of the state, Jagmohan. He wanted Pandits to leave so he could deal with the Muslims with an ‘iron fist’ and work towards larger designs of occupation. While there were several reported incidents where Pandits were threatened or killed, some families chose to continue living in the Valley. Today, local citizens of Kashmir and also the pro-resistance leaders are urging Kashmiri Pandits to return and live as they used to, but instead of facilitating this, the government is constructing small settlement colonies for them to inhabit. This move of constructing colonies

has been widely rejected by the pro-resistance leaders saying it is a threat to the demography of the Valley.²⁵

Professor and political analyst, Dr Sheikh Showkat Hussain presents a different perspective on the migration of Pandits. He writes that Kashmiri Pandits had started migrating since 1947. By 1953 almost one-sixth of their population (8,000 members) had migrated to India.²⁶ The migration towards greener pastures continued unabated until 1990. Following this, despite a decline in the growth rate and the numbers migrating, the Pandit population was depicted as increasing in every census. This demonstrated a clear manipulation of figures. Despite these alterations by the census department, the Hindu population within the Kashmir Valley in 1981 was 1,24,022 (Census India 1981). The eruption of militancy in 1990 provided urban Pandits a pretext to migrate *en masse*. Very few among non-Pandit groups however migrated. A segment of Kashmiri Pandits too remained in the Valley and shared the ordeals of the conflict along with their Muslim neighbours. By any stretch of the imagination the migrant population of Pandits could not exceed 1,00,000.²⁷

Once militancy took roots in the Valley, it continued unabated, with a few exceptions in the years to come. The sentiment of the resistance movement prevailed across Jammu and Kashmir. At one point in time, blasts and encounters occurred almost every day.

The first few years of the 1990s were the most brutal in the history of the conflicted Valley. After the 1996 assembly elections, when people were forced to vote at gunpoint, the National Conference Party and counter-insurgent groups ruled the state. People lived with trauma and threat – treating the injured, mourning for the dead and searching for those who had disappeared.²⁸

This was the story for more than a decade. A shift in the nature of resistance has been seen in the past few years; the generation that was born during the start of the war has been able to glean the nuances of the homeland's political situation. Most of the youngsters from this generation, born between the late 80s and early 90s, choose stones over guns. They throw stones at the Indian forces.²⁹

To this shift too, India has responded with brute force. Young people are continuously arrested and tortured. The circumstances are such that the young populace may well wish to turn the clocks backward, opt for the

choices made by their predecessors 24 years ago, and take up arms. What happened in 1988 might happen again; there has been no justice and the legitimate demands of people have been ignored every time. Since the armed resistance started, around 70,000 people have been killed;³⁰ thousands have been injured; 10,000 have been involuntarily made to disappear; and orphans, widows and several others languish in jails. Thousands of unmarked mass graves have been found.³¹

In August 2012, the Sopore police station was attacked with grenades. The state police blamed the Lashkar-e-Toiba for the attacks and investigations found that the grenades were lobbed by minor boys. The police said they had identified the boys as the CCTV footage clearly showed them throwing grenades at the police station. The superintendent of police in Sopore, Imtiyaz Ahmad told a national daily that they picked up two of the boys, aged 12 and 13 years, for questioning.

The blast of 1988 was followed by two decades of intense militancy. Now the grenade blasts of 2012 could well be followed by another phase of violence, where more young cadre could be recruited. This phase of militancy could be worse than the last one; its impact and outcome could be more widespread.

This could be the most intense phase of the Kashmir conflict, as the young boys are more passionate than their predecessors. They have been a part of the 2008 and 2010 mass protests, and have witnessed India's indifference to and dismissal of these struggles. Moreover, the present generation is also better educated. While the establishment may claim that most of the young men who have taken up militancy have left academic pursuits to join the ranks, the truth is a lot of them had been studying for courses, trying to earn a Master's degree in computer applications, physics or business management. Indeed, a boy who the police claimed had joined the Hizbul Mujahideen in 2011 was a school-going lad of 16. The police's theory therefore that the youth who protest or throw stones are 'misguided' or illiterate breaks into pieces.³²



If we look closely at the movement and understand it deeply, the resistance in Kashmir lies among the people, with the people. Pakistan did lend a helping hand to armed militancy in the late 1980s, but the contemporary

situation is different. No sane mind can call it a Pakistan-run movement.³³ Several Kashmiris might want Kashmir to merge with Pakistan, but on the whole they accept that there should be a referendum and the people should decide the course of events.

To further dilute the independence movement of Kashmir, the government of India has been trying to convince and coerce some individuals within the moderate Hurriyat Conference to contest elections. One of the leaders, Sajad Lone, who was pro-freedom, did contest Indian parliamentary elections in 2009 and lost. Now he is preparing for the next assembly election. Many politicians – mainstream and separatists – privately confirm that Indian agencies have been secretly financing political parties to contest elections, who in turn use that money to lure Kashmiris to vote. The money is also used to fragment the social fabric of the Valley, so Indian rule can be further strengthened.

Many youth have sensed this, and they are taking control of the situation. After decades of being led by pro-resistance and mainstream leaders, Kashmir now is directed by its youngsters. These boys and girls have understood the larger politics of Kashmir and are conceptually sound. They are minute in number but their presence is everywhere. And the ground wing of this ideologically rich group could be described as the stone throwers.

In September 2012, in Varmul (60 kilometres from Srinagar), a lad was arrested by the police in the morning allegedly for stone throwing. Later a group of boys manhandled a policeman and kidnapped him. For five hours he was nowhere to be found and the boys demanded the release of the lad in exchange for the policeman. The boys did release the policeman eventually. This is India's biggest worry right now, as it is not easy to tackle young, angry blood. Because of youth power, Kashmir could be on the brink of something momentous.



At 8 am, on 9 February 2013, India hanged Mohammad Afzal Guru. He was convicted for attacking the Indian parliament in 2001, after an unfair trial.

I went to Guru's home a few days after the hanging to meet his loved ones. Nobody from his family had been informed about the rejection of the

mercy petition by the Indian president or the hanging. A letter had been sent at the nth minute via speed post informing kinsfolk about Guru's impending execution; the letter reached days after the hanging. Since he had not been informed, Guru's 13-year-old son, Ghalib, couldn't even meet his father before the execution.

Following Guru's death, the government anticipated an outcry in Kashmir. Such expectations weren't unfounded, and Kashmir would have witnessed huge demonstrations, had the state government not imposed strict curfew from the early hours of the morning, which stretched on for a week. Kashmiris woke up to find themselves held captive in their homes. While in several localities people tried to break curfew, and protests broke out in some regions, by and large Kashmir became the largest prison on earth once more.

Guru's hanging will have repercussions at a larger level in future. As in the case of Maqbool Butt's execution in 1984, it's likely that the youth of Kashmir will spearhead the azadi movement and enhance its scope and scale.

Guru's hanging is also likely to strengthen the independence movement of Kashmiris, since it has been proven beyond doubt that India is indifferent to Kashmir's interests, and unresponsive to the calls of a people asking for the right of self-determination.³⁴

When I walked the streets of Kashmir and talked to different people after Guru's death, I was privy to strong anti-India discourse, more emphatic than any of the statements uttered before Guru's hanging. A senior journalist, a friend, while talking about the situation in Kashmir, said that the Valley felt like a pressure cooker. Dissent and anger are building within the region and nobody quite knows when the lid will burst.



'Kashmir is the most unreported place on earth,' an editor of a magazine I was working with told me once. I did not understand what he meant initially. After pondering over it for a while, I did glean the essence of the statement. There are a variety of stories about the people of Kashmir, some known to locals, some alien to even well-read residents. These narratives can be gathered from almost every newspaper, magazine or news channel. But the real stories within the region, the stories that are close to the

Kashmiri people's hearts, are not often revealed in the media. This book is an attempt at going beyond that barrier.

As a child, I wasn't inclined towards writing. I did not dream of becoming a journalist or a writer. The only thing I actively pursued during my childhood – which now strikes me as an innate desire to preserve memory – was keeping a diary. I used to cut photographs from newspapers of people killed and paste them in a black covered book gifted to me by a friend. I would then note the date and the biographical details of the slayed person. My father found the diary one day, and forced me to remove the pictures, as the Indian forces used to search houses during crackdowns. All the photographs that I had painstakingly saved were removed.

My mother also tells me of a photograph that was shot just outside our house. In that picture, she tells me, I was sitting with the then young rebels who had a hideout in our neighbourhood. I did not get to see the picture. My mother says that someone destroyed it when curfews became a regular affair. I later learnt that my family had expunged the photograph, and if they hadn't, the forces would have.

What is memory? It is a recording of the past; it is what we remember of the things we view or feel or hear. The picture that was destroyed was a memory captured on film. But there are more potent recording instruments. The human brain is like the film used in a camera. As the film is exposed to light, the brain is exposed to scenes of life, which it then captures. *This* film cannot be destroyed unless our brain stops functioning.

This book contains a collection of several such films. It is a compilation of numerous writers' interpretations of their memory of their experiences in the Valley. While most people have a complex tapestry of reminiscences, both joyous and sorrowful – in a place like Kashmir, which has been engulfed in a war for decades now, there are few happy recollections. However, no matter the pain, preserving these remembrances is all that Kashmiris can think of doing for their future generations. After years or decades, the generations that are yet to come will need a medium through which they can know what happened to their ancestors.

In this collection, the people of Kashmir narrate their stories. A few non-Kashmiris have also been included whose keen understanding of the Valley gives a sense of the knotty socio-political situation. Additionally, there are a few pieces from the online magazine, *The Kashmir Walla*, an independent voice of Kashmir since May 2011.

It has been a long journey – collecting these narratives and arranging them such that they highlight key aspects of the Kashmir conflict. The stories look at every facet of life in the Valley – the stolen childhoods of those born into conflict zones; the existence of youngsters in a state with strict curfews; their plummet, all too soon, into adulthood as they view strikes, crackdowns, killings and beatings at the hands of the Indian forces. While recording these voices, the anthology does not judge. Rather, it conveys what has happened in the Valley, what still unfolds every passing day and what the people want.

On the night I was writing the concluding parts of this introduction, I was in touch with a young boy who had been in jail for months under the draconian PSA and had been released only a month ago. I messaged him ‘good night’ and his response strengthened my conviction on the need for this collection. The young boy wrote: ‘What is so good about this night when you don’t know who is coming to get you in the night crackdown?’

Fahad Shah
New Delhi, February 2013

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Memoirs

I am writing to you from your far-off country. Far even from us who live here. Where you no longer are. Everyone carries his address in his pocket so that at least his body will reach home.

– Agha Shahid Ali

The Pain of Being Haunted by Memories



Showkat Nanda



When one of my articles on Kashmir was published by *Al-Jazeera* in August 2011, I was accused by many of having breached journalistic ethics and demeaning the profession I belong to. In the article, I had mentioned how I turned into a stone thrower while covering a demonstration as a news photographer in the summer of 2010.

Eight years ago, when I chose to become a photojournalist, it was a conscious decision. The unique experiences I had during my childhood and my passion for expressing myself through visuals – particularly those detailing the conflict in Kashmir that has devastated thousands of lives – greatly shaped my professional choices. I had no option but to turn to photojournalism, for I strongly believe what the famous photography critic and writer, Susie Linfield, says: ‘A journalistic photograph has important moral value and is entirely based on reality and therefore has historical validity.’¹

When I was a child, my friends at school would request me to draw maps and make diagrams for them. I would spend most of my time painting and drawing cartoons of my friends. However, I did not want to be a painter

or an architect. Despite having a penchant for visuals and fascination for photography, I grew up with the dream of becoming a successful doctor. That is what my parents also wanted me to be.

By the time I was 12, the conflict in Kashmir had already escalated into a full-blown small-scale war. I stopped dreaming about my future because everything was so uncertain. Survival became the topmost priority even for children like me. Bomb blasts, crackdowns and gun battles had become routine. I witnessed daily deaths, gunfights and search operations even in my school. These experiences greatly shaped my identity and the way I saw (and still see) the world. I was beginning to understand how a conflict looked and how it changed people's lives, including mine.

In the late 1990s, an American woman visited my native town of Varmul in Northern Kashmir. She had come to report a suicide attack on an Indian army garrison by militants; the event had taken place a few days earlier. Pointing towards a group of cricket-playing children that I myself was a part of, she asked if anyone could speak English. She wanted to talk to us because children, I suppose, are quite straightforward about whatever they witness. I hesitatingly approached and started talking to her. I shook hands with her as she introduced herself. 'Hello, my name is Pamela Constable and I work for a newspaper in America.' 'Which newspaper?' I asked innocently. '*Washington Post*,' said she.

I hadn't heard the name before. She talked to me for about 10 minutes asking me diverse questions about Kashmir and my feelings about the militants who had died during the attack. While answering her queries, I kept staring at her camera – a Nikon FM 10. Before she left, she asked me what I wanted to become when I grew up. 'A doctor,' was my immediate reply. 'Why not a writer or a photographer,' she asked, 'so that you can tell your story to the world?'

Pamela's remarks had a profound effect on me. My childhood interest in drawing and painting, my fascination for photography and my urge to tell stories from my land and of my people took precedence over all else. I decided to become a press photographer.

I started working as a photojournalist in 2005. For years, I photographed people and captured their lives. Most of the images were political or conflict-related. My pictures started getting published in newspapers and magazines. Everyone – my editors, colleagues and fellow photographers – praised me for my work. I felt really proud of myself.

There was a certain amount of excitement too, for I belonged to a profession that was overtly glamorous and full of adventure, and granted me a licence to virtually every event. Sometimes, I was convinced I was levitating – I was *that* happy.

Until... I felt that there was something terribly wrong. I found myself in an ethical dilemma. As a journalism student, I had been taught that a journalist was there to record facts and not to participate in them. I followed this tenet for years and brought back ‘beautiful’ stories of pain and suffering. I saw people crying but never cried myself. I saw shattered limbs but never felt too unpleasant. I had to be strong, strong enough to keep my limbs moving to ‘enjoy’ the profession. Most of my pictures were snapshots of people I had reduced to mere subjects, nothing less, and nothing more.

But every time I went to photograph people – and these were the people going through the worst of suffering – they would look into my eyes hoping that I would do something to bail them out of all of life’s troubles. They welcomed me to the doorstep of their grief, hoping I would rescue them. Instead, I approached them like a hungry vulture and pounced on their sorrows. I started feeling awfully guilty about photographing them, and not living up to their expectations. At first, I sought justifications. I told myself: ‘There is nothing I can really do, except tell the world what is going on in my land through pictures.’ Yet the more excuses I made, the more I feared, I was growing immune.

I had to remind myself why I had ventured into this vocation. When I started working as a photojournalist, I had longed to take pictures that were testimonies to what I had already experienced as a child. I had made a pledge that come what may, I would never lose my humanity. Photography, for me, wasn’t just about looking; it was about *feeling*. If you can’t feel what you are looking at, you are never going to get others to feel anything either.

I realised, it was criminal being a mute spectator when I knew things were going wrong. In a situation where feelings ran strong, I could not merely shrug off responsibility and assume my job was done after taking pictures.

The more I thought along these lines, the more I changed. Suddenly, the men, women and children in my photographs became mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, husbands, wives, relatives and friends. I began to attach a certain amount of dignity to my presence. I tried to almost

be invisible. I tried to be there, but not there. I began to think of myself not only as a photojournalist but as a person who belonged to these people and identified with their pain. I could no longer detach myself from what was happening on the other side of the camera.

Now, whenever I photographed people, I tried to look through my camera as objectively as possible. But at the same time I did not let my camera lens – a fragile piece of transparent glass – become a barrier for the emotions I felt for people I photographed. I taught myself to react through my camera, to draw all the anger and frustration into my pictures so that those who see them could feel the same.

Sometimes, you face situations where you are torn between your duties as a professional and your responsibilities as a human being. Generally, people try to strike a balance between the two. But when your profession compels you to detach yourself from whatever you are witnessing – even at the cost of basic humanity – you have every right to question your choices. If I feel that there is nothing *I* can do, I risk becoming cynical and apathetic. Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers.

I chose action in the summer of 2010 during an anti-India demonstration. I literally found myself in the position of those I had been photographing for years, and all the feelings I had experienced as a photographer while witnessing the bloodshed of my people found culmination. I turned into a rebel because I felt that lessons in neutrality and objective journalism sometimes make us so weak that we end up aligning ourselves with falsehood without even knowing it.

The impetus actually came from an incident that had taken place a year earlier in the summer of 2009. It was a rainy afternoon. An anti-India demonstration that was underway had almost subsided and there were only a few children confronting the paramilitary forces. I had just finished my day's shooting and was relaxing, looking at the already clicked photographs. Suddenly the rattle of gunfire filled the air. I wasn't able to fathom what the matter was until some boys emerged with a 12-year-old kid who had been shot straight in the chest. He had been injured by Indian paramilitary forces.

I still remember him, and his drooping eyes. He looked at me as if he was making a plea for help. It was as though he was trying to say, 'Please don't allow this; please help me.' I quote from my article:

He lay in my arms, blood oozing from his mouth. I felt choked but tried to smile as I told him he was going to be alright. He smiled back, perhaps in disappointment, for he knew I was lying. Tears welled up in my eyes but I looked up at the sky as I tried to stop them from falling. I did not want my eyes to convey that his death was near, very near. The second time I looked up at the sky to hold back my tears, I felt a freezing numbness in his body. His smile had turned into a ghastly stare. He was dead.²

It is an eternal torment, to see someone staring into your eyes just before his death. The kid was looking at me tenderly; maybe he was looking at me because he believed me. He was sure I could do something for him. But I knew he was wrong.

I was angry not only at those who had killed him but also at myself. A kid had fallen fighting for freedom and here I was with a camera to capture his last moments. It is impossible to imagine the questions rushing through the minds of dying people when a journalist with a camera comes along, takes pictures and leaves.

I did not know what to do. Would you, the reader, expect me to take the boy's photograph as he died? I hope not. For in such situations, the least one can do is respect a human being's sacrifice by not making him the subject of one's visual adventures. I left the place without capturing him on camera. I wanted to scream and do something. I couldn't do it because the 'burden' of journalism hung around my neck, and I felt utterly powerless.

I, however, did take the picture of his schoolmate throwing stones at the paramilitary forces. For a complete year, the gentle eyes of the boy who died in my arms kept appearing before me. I could feel him in my arms every day and every night I would dream of him. Then I would look at the picture of his stone throwing schoolmate, and this helped me channel my emotions.

The photograph of the schoolmate had a story behind it too – the story of deceit, viciousness and at the same time of innocence, courage and resolution. For me that single frame depicted the story of my childhood and all my friends and all the boys I knew, long before I had actually realised I was going to be a photojournalist. Here was a little boy challenging a state, a million times stronger, with a stone in his hand. I would look at this picture for hours and could literally hear what this young kid seemed to be saying: 'Look, I am in front of your gun barrel for a purpose, and by choice. I am not an accidental revolutionary getting paid for every stone I throw, neither am I a misguided puppet as the world is made to believe. I am not a

suicidal maniac either, obsessed with coming out of this dreadful game of death as a martyr. I am here demanding a different life – a life where the land I belong to exists as a nation on the map of the world; where I do not live and die with an uncertain identity. A life where there are no bunkers, no checkpoints and no barriers of coiled razor wire; where I am not greeted by gun-wielding soldiers on my way to school; where my parents are not humiliated every day; where my tiffin box and school bag are not searched for weapons; where I am not killed in a playground with a cricket ball still in my hand; and where I am not thrown into the shadows of despair and frustration.’

I had myself grown up feeling the same way. I too wanted to have an identity – a nationality that identified me as a citizen of the nation I was born in; where I was raised by my parents; where I shared my pain and happiness with my chums. An identity where my heart always belonged.

That’s why I turned into a stone thrower. I couldn’t leave without making a statement. I chose not to be a spectator or a coward. I don’t know if what I did was right or wrong. But it was what I believe I should have done. I acted just as a Kashmiri who wanted to hold his head high before these kids dying on the streets. I may be not have been free as a professional to engage in this act, but as an individual I was certainly free to give vent to all the frustration I had been living with.

I acted for the little kid who had died in my arms and for his stone throwing schoolmate and for all the children who fell to the bullets before and after. Their death was not a tragedy. I didn’t want to sit back and accept this calamity as something fated. I acted against all the humiliation that befell my people.

It’s hard to be neutral when your kitchen turns into a battlefield. I have a point of view. Over the years, while working as a photojournalist, I have seen streams of tears falling down the cheeks of mothers and sisters; I have heard the screams of dying people, widows and orphans. I want to tell those who think that I have humiliated my profession about how humiliated *I* have felt while witnessing the humiliation of my people.

I don’t know if my getting involved made a difference. But I made a statement that whatever was happening was absolutely horrendous. I did it because before being a journalist, I was a man who belonged to this society and people. I realised my responsibility and I acted on it. I do not care if someone else follows suit.

There comes a time in your life when you need freedom from blood-soaked memories. I also needed freedom from those memories I've framed as self-taken pictures – of dead children, wailing mothers, disgraced fathers and destroyed homes.

I confess, for me, there was no other way of lessening the pain of these haunting memories.

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A Crackdown in Natipora



Shahnaz Bashir

It was a misty dawn of a frigid winter in the late 90s, and an incomprehensible loudspeaker announcement woke us up. Mother ran room to room in our house making certain everyone was apprised of what some older people of our neighbourhood mispronounced as *crapdown* – crackdown.

The voice of the announcer, perhaps the muezzin or caretaker of our local mosque, had not crackled clearly; the message had been befuddling, and it made everyone groggily ask each other certain things: Where were the men going to be assembled for the identification parade? What was the cutoff age of boys to stay back with women at home?

Our house stood on the edge of the main road. The attic overlooked a considerable stretch of the road. So, as all of us were grappling with our *pherans* (loose cloak-like flowing gowns worn in winter), Mother ran upstairs towards the attic and from there carefully peeked out at the main road.

‘They are being deployed like ants,’ she informed us and began juggling with the things in the house: filling coals in everyone’s *kanger*¹ or quickly trying to make *chapattis* for us, which we would take along to the parade. Then she strutted out into our small lawn, behind our house, to check if my cousins and the neighbourhood boys of my age were going for the parade.

I was in my teens then. Fine hair had begun to appear over my upper lip and under my sideburns. I was torn by the thought of going to my first crackdown parade because nothing scared me more than the idea of facing a masked *mukhbir*, an informer. And going to the parade for the first time was also an indication that I had *really* grown up.

I went out after Mother, blowing steamy breath into my hands through the neck of my pheran. I checked to see if the boys of my age were really preparing for the parade.

‘Yes, they are going,’ said Mother, ‘they all are going. *Wani kyah bani?* (What will happen now?)’

She lifted off all the clothes from the sagging line that ran across the lawn. They had frozen in the January chill, as though starched. Fearing that I might freeze in the nip outside, since the zipper of my pheran had snapped, Mother returned to the house and began looking for my woollen clothes in sizes I had outgrown. ‘A couple of pullovers will keep you warmer, that is,’ she said partially to herself and partially to me, while stoking through a messy pile of old winter clothes in a large tin trunk; the trunk was in the store under the wooden flight of stairs that led to the upper storeys of the house. A whiff of camphor and that smell of old cloth made me feel vaguely good in that long tense moment. Mother found a crumpled pair of knitted sweaters at the bottom of the trunk and a wrinkled rat-grey herringbone tweed muffler.

‘Don’t worry. The open neck is not a problem. You will wear sufficient woollen pullovers inside and wind the muffler around your face to keep warm,’ Mother muttered sounding convinced, slipping the old sweaters through my neck, one over the other, after I had slid off my pheran. Then, I pulled over two pairs of woollen socks under a nylon one. I wound the muffler around my neck and Mother corrected it, covering my ears properly under a fold. She insisted I wear a bobble cap too.

‘You are not a militant. So you don’t have to fear,’ Father told me confidently in front of Mother, winding his muffler around the lower part of his face. My younger brother was still asleep and not disturbed at all. My paternal uncles and cousins, who lived side by side in houses around ours, were waiting for us to join them. When Father and I were about to step out of our main door, Mother hollered at us to stop.

My father was a rationing officer in the state government. He would usually carry bales of cash in his official leather hand purse from the places of his duty and later deposit the cash at his head office at Shaheed Gunj on Saturdays. It was not a Saturday that day and he had a load of money with him at home.

‘What do we do with the cash?’ Mother asked Father.

My parents discussed suitable places to hide the cash in. Father suggested our small black-and-white Orient television but Mother quickly reminded him, 'They don't even spare TV sets. Think of something else.'

They, Father and Mother, settled on the big switchbox on the wall of our kitchen. Father fetched a screwdriver and gouged it out. The face-board with its switches hung awkwardly on a jumble of naked-tipped wires, leaving some room for the hand purse. Father considered the situation for a while, switched off the power supply to the switchbox, clumsily tried pushing in the hand purse bulging with cash, but it still stuck out. He gave up on the idea, drew out the purse, and screwed the board back to its wooden frame.

A while later when Father and Mother were busy tucking the moneyed purse into a tied bunch of hay on the attic, I stole out into my room to hide a collection of my own important things whose weight would make heavy the pocket of my pheran – a run-out pencil size battery, nine polished pebbles, some broken pens with their springs popping loose, a few defunct electric switches, a hard slippery horse-chestnut, a key-fob suspended on a Vicks inhaler, a dysfunctional cigarette lighter, a fragment of a magnet, a pinion of an old alarm that worked as a top, 10 green marbles, a pair of flint stones, a dial of an old strapless wristwatch and a hexagonal aluminium 20-paisa coin. I emptied the pocket into the enclosed, lidded space of my writing desk.

Father and I changed into our matching black winter plastic shoes and left for the parade, cramming a bundle of folded chapattis in the pockets of our pherans. As it had taken us a while to hide the cash, my uncle and cousins had already left. We didn't have gold or expensive shawls or money of our own to stow away – except for a pair of Mother's ear hoops and a thin gold bangle that she had hidden, like any other woman would do in a crackdown, as soon as the announcement from the mosque had bellowed.

Father became tense for we were a little late to go to the parade. To save us from the wrath of the troops stationed outside the main gate of our house, Mother quickly made Lipton tea for them, strained it into an enormous sky blue Eagle flask, put as many as two dozen cups into a wicker bag and said to us, 'First serve tea to them and then you leave for the parade. I will collect the cups and the flask myself later. Go.' We did as told and it worked. As Father served tea I observed the hands of the troops, the

chapped and gnarled and callused and hard hands, dusky from outside and fair from inside. Some troops were jerking their fatigued knees.

It was biting icy outside under the milky winter sky. I rubbed my palms together to warm them. I had taken everything along, with the exception of a pair of gloves. Even Mother forgot to find them for me.

Both sides of the main road were lined with heavily armed men belonging to Rashtriya Rifles, commonly known as RR. They wore turban-like helmets and padded bulletproof chests, and swung long bamboo sticks in their hands, cracking them on the calves and thighs of the latecomers.

On the way, I found many of our neighbours running along with us. The old Ramzan Khaar would stop every 10 paces to take in a long asthmatic breath, his hands on his knees, as if in *namaaz*, then run again. Not a single shop was open, their paint-flaking or primer-coated shutters rolled down. The dusty model of the underwear ad painted on the shutter of Raj Mohammad's grocery shop smiled and stared at me until I was out of his field of vision. And the rickety old folding wooden doors of Amm's bakery had its large steel padlock on. I noticed some women and children furtively peering at us from behind the panes in the houses that, like ours, stood by the edge of the main road. I could hear Father's huffing and see rapid short clouds of his steamy breath bursting from his muffled mouth.

For the identification parade, the people of Natipora were assembled in a plum orchard that belonged to Shamboo Nath, a migrant Kashmiri Pandit. It was a kilometre away from our house. I, with my cousins, had played in the orchard many times before. We would enjoy sitting high on the mossy branches of the plum trees for hours. We'd disappear in the dense foliage, and marvel at the sunlight that would come winking through the leaves. However, the day of crackdown was unlike all others, for I was going to Shamboo Nath's for an identification parade.

Shivering, people squatted in the middle of the orchard. Hundreds of kangars huddled on one side on the ground and olive-green military one-tonnes and jeeps on the other. It was difficult to sit on the ground in the beginning. All over, the buff turf was covered with ash-like frozen dew. And the earth was cold too. I sat beside Father, reclining against a plum tree that doubled as stumps in the cricket played between the boys of Natipora Vs Budshah Nagar. Or you could say, I sat in the batter's crease.

While we were at the parade, house-to-house searches had already begun on the other side. Mother had set all the outdated Urdu newspapers

on fire. She had picked up Father's forgotten golden wristwatch from the ledge of their bedroom's window, and the timepiece from my room that would wake me up for early morning private tuitions. During the search operation, the troops, as punishment, inextricably mixed rice, flour, red chilly powder and sugar together in those houses which were suspected to produce or support or hide militants.

The search parties would rake the households inside out – stoking barrels full of rice, rummaging through tin trunks, wardrobes and cupboards, disarranging clothes, messing up furniture, overturning floor mats, capsizing stocks of firewood, charcoal and hay, peeping under beds, tapping on surfaces, checking for underground hideouts – all this, I had witnessed in the earlier crackdowns when I had stayed back with the women as child.

As soon as we had stepped out the house, Mother had joined my aunties and the neighbourhood women. In the absence of men, women, who would be alone at home in crackdowns, stuck together. While the search parties searched the houses, army drivers secretly pipetted out oil from the fuel tanks of their vehicles into worn, dim, transparent plastic bottles and cans. For, crackdown-time was *business* time too.

In the orchard the troops were still beating those arriving late. 'You must be digging pits to hide your Kalashnikovs, *saalon!*' a low rank RR officer, wearing a heavy fur-lined olive-green Camo jacket, shouted out at the latecomers.

People were intermingled to the extent that it was difficult to find my uncles and cousins in the gathering. Later, craning my neck from where I was, and peering past hundreds of heads, I found each one of them. But they all were scattered around the other side of the assembly and couldn't be reached.

And then suddenly my panning eyes stopped at a man from Budshah Nagar. He was the father of the girl, my classmate at school, who many boys had tried to accost. I too liked her but she hadn't been even acknowledging my attention. On that day of the crackdown, I was happy to find her father. I studied every detail of his person. His checkered light grey and black pheran. His dark complexion (unlike the girl's fair one). His flabby cheeks (unlike the girl's sleek ones). His fat black-head-infested nose (unlike the girl's narrow one). She rather rightly resembled her mother instead, who I had once seen in a tailor's workshop. Not in a single feature

of his did her father look like *her* father. He shouldn't have been her father at all, I thought. But since he really was, and was available to me on that fateful day as the best distraction one could enjoy on such a dreadful occasion, he brought relief. I wished I had been closer to him. But he was metres away.

Some revered local elders arrived much later. And for coming late, the troops made them stand upside down against some empty barrels, which belonged to a kerosene oil dealer. Their pherans fell around their heads and got tangled; their *pajamas* slipped down to their knees exposing their fuzzy vascular legs.

The officer strode in front of the punished men and probed the pockets of their pherans with his long bamboo cane. He saw a machine-written green-blue crescent-and-star under-skin mark on the back of an old man's hand.

'So you are Pakistani?' the officer teased him.

'Sir, it was done on my hand when I was a child. Pakistan didn't exist then,' the old man said, facing the ground, panting, his face puffy and flushed as most of his blood had flowed to his head.

'Shut up! Latecomers are punished even in the schools,' the officer said incoherently, sending his subordinates into fits of laughter.

Distraught, people squirmed in the cold of the orchard; they watched on, bleary-eyed and silent. The dormant anger in them slowly rose at the scene of punishment. All the time, Father was worried about his official cash. If the troops found it in the bunch of hay and stole it, he could face immediate suspension or worse, termination.

The troops let loose a slavering German Shepherd into the gathering. The dog barked and pulled on his leather-leash. 'Silky Silky Silky!' a trooper persuaded the dog to behave. But the animal kept dangling his long pink tongue sideways down his mouth and gasped fast. He blew puffs of steam into the chilly air. Silky snarled and yapped at the pheran-ed men.

Hours passed and still there was no parade.

Sometimes a dull sun beamed briefly through a screen of clouds like the copper stain in the silver coating of a thermos bottle. Yet the cold persisted. The humiliation continued. When some men were allowed to go behind a dilapidated wall, that separated the orchard from the gutted house of Shamboo Nath, to pee, Father managed to get a kanger and asked me to

shaal pha (share the warmth of the kanger under his pheran). I sat opposite him. I entered my lifeless hands into his pheran, put them over the kanger, and was relieved to taste heat. I kept turning my hands. The warmth didn't last long. In idleness, when the kangars had been kept aside, the embers had consumed all the coal underneath. The fire was almost ash and died soon.

In these moments of uncertainty, we had forgotten hunger. I did not touch the chapattis. In fact nobody seemed to eat; I didn't see a mouth moving. Lips were either pursed or agape. In the meantime, my butt was so chill-numbed that I couldn't feel it. I stealthily tried checking it, hard, harder, hardest, but hardly sensed anything. I felt like I was pinching someone else's flesh.

I looked at Father and again found his stilled gaze fraught with apprehension. I glanced in the direction where I had spotted the girl's father but was puzzled by his absence. He must have shifted from his place when people had been given a chance to get back their kangars. I turned my head right and left and right, but failed to spot him.

'Who are you looking for?' Father asked.

'Uncle,' I said abruptly, meaning father's brother. 'I saw him over there, and all the cousins too.'

Again and again I looked at the hazy sunless sky. Or at the leafless branches of the plum trees. Or at the barren paddy fields down the orchard. Or at the fog-devoured top of Mount Takht-e-Suleimaan. Or I simply watched the high jagged pillar of Shamboo Nath's ravaged house scraping the overcast heavens. Time didn't move.

Everyone was still anticipating a parade. Some had prepared to get whisked away when the mukhbir sitting behind the steering wheel of a Gypsy would honk.

Suddenly though, an old man in the gathering, to the amazement of all, stood up and audaciously shouted at the army officer. 'What the hell you think you are doing with us? Are we animals? Don't you have elders at home? Do you treat them the same way? Turn them upside down and beat them with a cane?' he roared, slowly advancing towards the officer.

For a second it seemed like death would ravage all of us. The officer was speechless and anxiously ran his eyes over the gathering.

Father murmured to me, '*Wani kyah bani? Khabar mouj aasiyi theekai?* (What will happen now? I pray for your mother's wellbeing.)'

I couldn't get the connection between the situation then, and my mother. Father for some reason had asked about both at once. But I thought either we all were going to die or something was going to happen at home. Or had happened. Father's cash gone... no!

Anything was possible. Anything. But somehow I was not scared. Not for myself anyway. If I was worried, it was primarily for Mother and then for Father's cash.

The daring old man fuelled courage and unity in the gathering. Soon everyone began to thrum and thunder. In less than 10 minutes people were volleying their kangars up into the air and chanting slogans of azadi. The air in the orchard became grey and thick with ash. Everywhere, the place stank of a stale combustion.

The troops cocked their guns. Meanwhile, the sound of a siren announced the arrival of the Commanding Officer (CO) of the regiment. The army began to shoo the men who were already trying to break the cordon, and clear the way for the CO. The CO was a Stetsoned fat and stout man in Ray Ban police goggles, the strap of the hat cutting a ridge in his jowl. The Vakas flowers over his heart pocket suggested his seniority and high rank.

All the elderly men gathered around him and complained about the low rank officer's behaviour. The CO expressed regret on behalf of his men, his hands digging deep in his military pants' pockets. He ordered the whole regiment to pack and withdraw.

The straining LMGs and erected high-angled smoothbore mortars were lifted off. The engines of the army vehicles began to chug and the troops started jumping into them. People moved out of the orchard towards the main road, lining both sides of the street like two human walls – hooting, whistling, dancing, laughing and teasing the vacating army.

As people leisurely walked back home, the women, children and anxious relatives, who had burst from the surrounding neighbourhoods, stood on the sills of shops and by doorways, waiting for their men. Concerned about the fate of his cash, Father almost jogged back home and made me keep pace with him.

Mother was hunched over the grille of the front veranda of our house; she was intently scanning the main road for us. She hugged me when I entered the gate. '*Shukur Khuadaayas kun* (thank god),' she said, smiling

and happy about our safe return. Then she turned to Father, and sensing his urgent curiosity about the cash, she said, before he could ask, ‘The cash is safe. They just surveyed the attic but didn’t touch the hay.’

Father was at once relieved. His face brightened. On days like this, there was hope in this land of despair.

¹ A kanger is a traditional Kashmiri pot filled with hot embers, often kept beneath blankets, cloaks or pherans, or used to warm hands.

Forgetting



Mohamad Junaid

'If the tyre bursts, there will be a massacre.'

It is a risk. I see the magnified, bloodshot eye behind the crosshairs of the telescope. I can't see the face to which the eye belongs. The hands are steady on the machine gun. The taut veins suggest they are consciously firm. *Like when one is about to hold someone else's newborn child and the body tenses itself up instinctively in anticipation...* The machine gun itself appears restive in those flexed hands, *quivering with potential in the way as, some say, a crowbar in a willing hand exudes an energy of prying.* Everything else dissolves into darkness in this bunker of sand bags and concrete. If I focus my eyes further, I tell myself, I might see the flickering pupil of the eye behind the telescope, measuring the range, angle, and direction. *Eyes in war lose sight, become radars. They find, locate, trace. But they don't see.*

I relax my eyes.

The bunker is grafted onto the base of an awkwardly built four- (or five-) storey building. Each successive floor of the building stretches out further than the one below, towards the town-square nearby. The bunker spills into the street in front of it, and has a three-sided view. There is another bunker on the top floor of this gravity-defying building, with three narrow openings on its three visible sides, all fitted with light machine guns whose muzzles are strung with lists of names. I can't read the names on the lists, even though I have a feeling that I know who all are on them. I can barely lift my exhausted eyes. They have been shifting, but constantly open – watching, but not staring, or being allowed to wander.

'You must not focus your eyes on one particular thing beyond a reasonable limit of time. You must see what is unfolding in front of you. See only that which we show you.'

It is quite taxing on the eyes, especially when your entire life keeps flitting past in discrete, momentary fragments. *I was afraid that if I focused too intensely, light would beam from my too eager eyes, giving me away, and I would also be put on the list.*

From the corner of my eye, I can scan the giant circle of bright light that illuminates the street around me. There must be a light straight above me, I surmise. I cast several shadows, however, in several directions, all of different lengths and all connected to my feet. 'But where are my feet?' If I move, this show of light and shadows will be disrupted. *It felt as if I was on stage...we were being staged.* The snow on the street makes the circle of light even brighter, reminding me that my feet have frozen in this white icy blanket that has covered the slush of the day.

Several spots of red and yellow produce a peculiar pattern on the white snow. While bright red turns dark as it seeps and lies dispersed across the surface in the form of small globules, the continuously fading yellow forms circles around dark holes in the snow. There are other long and short shadows that seem to converge just behind these holes. From the corners of my eyes, I can see that the holes are in line on either side of me. *The pattern as perfect as a picture.*

A fire is burning on the corner of the street, past the few ramshackle buildings on my right. An armoured car has moved noiselessly on the snow, as though its engines are turned off, and it has parked close to the fire. The flames have grown taller. There is another fire by the opposite corner of the street. Several men are huddled around it, their backs turned toward the car. Their silhouettes show rifles slung on their shoulders. Helmets, long dark coats, and high white boots leave no doubt that the men are soldiers.

A grim warning is announced on the loudspeaker, 'If we find any man in these houses, he will be responsible for his own fate!' *Isn't this what one wants ultimately, to be responsible for one's own fate? Not under such conditions, I remind myself.*

I try to remember how warmth feels. I think about Lal Chowk in summer (or even during the winter when things are on the move), the white fleece blanket the Gujars sold us for 300 rupees, the blazing kanger which an arrogant soldier kicked over early in the morning in my home to wake me up, the red beans on steamy rice I ate the night before – the rear tyre of the armoured car has caught fire, but the soldiers are oblivious to it – I remember my father's fingers gently combing through my hair, the sweat

from playing cricket, walking, being able to speak and tell tales from the past. My memory has turned into fire.

I hear him whisper again, 'If the tyre bursts, there will be a massacre.'



He has this dream almost each night. Sometimes, it ends in massacre. He sees body parts all around. In piles. In pools. Floating. Hanging. Lying in mud. Assembled into bodies, but not in their usual places. Gouged-out eyes in the palm of his hand, sometimes still functional, if not seeing then still moving; or sometimes just dead eyeballs. Mouths cracking out of throats, or deep slits in throats that look like mouths. Disembowelled men dragging their innards behind them as they walk away from the scene. Heads with tufts of hair and scalp missing. Trophies for our enemy.

This dream was narrated to me, in Kashmiri, during the summer of 2011, in more or less the form in which I have presented it. When I read back to my neighbour what he had told me, he added the remarks that I have italicised. His remarks are indistinguishable from the dream narration itself, for the man told me that while he has the dream, such thoughts come to him often. He thinks while he dreams.

My neighbour's nightmares began on that fateful day in 1994 when our part of Islamabad town was put under military siege. The siege began early in the morning. The military had already spread out throughout the town, closing off *all* possible escape routes – which is how they dramatically announced it from the mosque loudspeakers. The local *imam* who had woken early for prayers was *pressed* into service, a feat accomplished by pinning him flat on the floor of the mosque and stomping on his back. He translated military commands from Hindi to Kashmiri, a painful role he was forced to play throughout that day. The men from our neighbourhood and all the male children 'who stood taller than a regular-size soldier's hip' were asked to walk to the nearby fruit market, with heads down and hands out of pockets.

I fit the size without doubt.

The earth underneath was hard. I pressed with my rubber shoes into the frozen puddles of water on the way. They were tough to break. The noise of feet crunching through ice was the only sound that could be heard

– aside from an occasional rasping: ‘*Behenchod, seedhechal!* (Sisterfucker, walk straight!)’ In the dead of winter in Kashmir, even the birds sleep late.

There were shoes made of rubber or leather. There were some quite flimsy sandals, even ridiculous bath slippers! And then there were the long white boots. The white boots stood stationary. The others were marching slowly toward the fruit market. Sometimes the long white boots would go high in the air and land on somebody, who would then respond with a yelp of pain.

Outside the fruit market, people were waiting in several lines to be frisked and admitted. As they walked through, the soldiers manning the two entrances slapped the elderly, gun-butted the younger men, and scared the children by pretending to hit. Each time a child was startled, the soldiers laughed. I was around 13 then, and didn’t know which category I fell into, child or young man. I was of medium height with an early-morning grave, expressionless face. As I walked through the door, my face flush with nervous blood, I winced as the soldier raised his rifle up in the air. The next few seconds were ones of intense cathexis, the unfolding event gathering my entire life and dumping it into a pile in front of me. I grabbed the soldier’s arm involuntarily, perhaps to stop him. I don’t know what hit me on my neck, the rifle butt, the back of a hand or a stick, or several of each, but I was in pain.

As I was shoved towards the fruit market, the people behind me in the line seemed angry with me. ‘You want us all to get killed!’ ‘You don’t appeal to these beasts.’ I was in a strange daze. I rubbed my neck with my palms, and slowly walked towards the centre of the market.



The fruit market is a large rectangular space with medium-size stores on three sides, and a fence at the back. In the summer, the stores are generally full of fruits and vegetables, with big trucks either loading or unloading their goods in front of them. Since nobody bothers to clean up, the garbage normally piles up in the centre of the market. Truck drivers from the Indian plains defecate behind trucks parked along the fence. During the rains, mud mixes liberally with fruit peels, torn jute bags, falling leaves, urine and excreta, producing a poisonous bog of filth. With each passing year, the venomous filth ferments even more, and new layers of rot are added to pre-existing layers. Add to this the pungency of chemically treated raw fruits or

the stench of rotting bananas inside the stores, and the market becomes a veritable gas chamber. Winter freezes the bog into a slushy pond, but the stench remains as strong.

But there we were, all the men and boys from the neighbourhood, on a cold morning in the dead of winter, many of us barely clothed for the weather, standing ankle deep in that fetid morass. ‘Sit down, you motherfuckers, and we will give you azadi today!’ Ominous dark clouds in the sky turned darker and darker, until big flakes of snow started to fall. ‘Now, who needs it first?’

Utter silence.

Several small military vehicles, carrying commanders, drove into the open and screeched to a halt in front of a tightly packed crowd of close to 300 of us. As the doors of the vehicles were flung open, a ‘cat’ – the informer – came out. Masked and in military overalls, the man with a tired and twitchy gait, his left arm hanging limp as if it had fallen out of the shoulder joint, pointed with his right hand at people one by one, and the men were ordered to separate themselves from the crowd. The local imam was asked to translate if someone failed to notice the fateful finger pointed at himself. With each name he announced, the imam cried. Several of the chosen men walked defiantly and on their own, while others were dragged or kicked to the front. They were walked in line and delivered by threes or fours to different stores, whose shutters had been thrown open.

The rest of us were told to squat.

We waited with intense apprehension. First there was silence. Sometime later, there were mumbling voices. Then expletives. Then loud blows followed by barks of agonizing pain. Then there were some strange deathly groans, a forced gurgling as if the men in the stores were drowning. From where I was sitting, I could see into several open stores – I could see the iron rods, bamboo sticks, gun butts, and chains raining on young men from our neighbourhood. For hours. It was unbearable to watch as blood and pieces of flesh splattered the dirty walls of the stores. Time stood frozen, as if in a cursed ring, looping back on itself, repeating the cycles of torture.

An old man in the crowd couldn’t take it anymore. He got up, and screamed our rebel yell, ‘*Hum kya chahtay!* (Say, what do we want!)’ In a snap, a soldier standing nearby struck the man hard across his face with his heavy bamboo *lathi*. A number of soldiers gathered and tried to reach him,

but the crowd doggedly formed a ring around the man, pleading, but absorbing the slaps and kicks. I learnt later that his son was in one of the stores.

The stores had been left open. This three-sided theatre of terror continued for hours. We were supposed to watch it in its gruesome detail to learn the lesson. The pedagogy of the oppressor, in 3-D. Some of the tortured were left in the stores to awaken later from having been beaten unconscious. Those who were still conscious were marched out amid kicks and expletives, and were either pushed back into the crowd or bundled into vans and driven away.

Women's cries reverberated across the neighbourhood. Outside the marketplace, no one knew what was going on. In between the cries, there was sporadic firing. The firing sounded strange, not like that of two sides firing at each other, to which our ears had become quite attuned over the previous few years. It sounded like a treadle sewing machine, one short burst of fire, then silence, and then one more burst. If two sides had been firing at each other it would have sounded like short crackles of Kalashnikov fire answered by lunatic bursts of light machine guns. Everyone glumly concluded that those bursts were fired to kill.

The siege ended late in the evening. Hungry, tired and cold we rushed to the places outside the market from which we had heard cries. By nightfall, four dead bodies were found at different places on the banks of Arapat, the stream that runs on the edge of our neighbourhood. A few months earlier, the Indian government had decided to go for what their bureaucrats stolidly called a 'Catch and Kill' policy. Guerrillas, their supporters, and suspects wouldn't be sent to jail anymore, if caught. The four dead were all local men, streams of their still warm blood mixing with the icy waters of Arapat, the backs of their heads open, their brains smashed to bits. One of them was a much-respected guerrilla. Another was a tailor who had been an armed activist a few years before with an organisation that had given up armed struggle. The other two were just poor young men. Torture had left several more on the cusp of death. Over the years, a number of them would die prematurely.

Funerals were quickly arranged and performed, after which the men went home to find women waiting in fear and anxiety. The women were rearranging upturned furniture, scattered utensils, emptied cupboards, and tossed clothes, the result of the day's house-to-house searches. Some

reported missing jewellery, others broken appliances. Our house looked as if several dozen unruly brigands had broken in. We cooked a meal for the wailing family of the neighbour who had been beaten senseless.



Here I want to clearly state a few things. I am not saying memories don't falter. We forget and we misremember. We forget a lot in life, despite the ritual domestication of traumatic memory and social memorialisation of events. Forgetting *much* in life is the condition for the continued possibility of life – especially when that life is lived under a violent occupation. Each day is eventful. Each event brings pain. Each new pain is worse than the one before. Gradually, one forgets the immediacy and the *feltness* of such pain. In essence, one could say, forgetting and telling are similar – if violence dismembers life-worlds, amnesia and memorialisation re-members that torn-apart world – of course, as a different, transmogrified, fleeting home for life to continue to exist. Forgetting is not erasure though. One can't erase the memory of one's pain, when even small moments of embarrassment or joy remain firmly etched and embodied within us in ways that can come back any time, at the slightest provocation. At best, one can sublimate pain into deeply textured narratives of the past and interweave it with collective hopes for a future, where suffering shall be recognised as sacrifice – a future of justice, of azadi. In the present, however, the loss of pain, the loss of its immediacy, numbness, allows one to go on.

But memories do falter. We do remember what many others may remember of these events. In telling, however, we invariably slough off the rough edges and the individual inflections in the collective narrative. Often, in narrating facts, and in testimonies, we don't include the sensations and affects that are always intrinsic to the structure of our experience. One can, however, recall and tell the personal within the collective, as one relives the sensations etched on the words that describe pain. For instance, I had to concentrate hard but I finally remember the sulphurous taste in my mouth when I returned home that day. It wasn't the inhaled stench wafting from the bog in the fruit market. It was impotent anger.



Yet, I don't remember seeing the man who told me about his nightmares, in the crowd that day. He insists he was there. It has been 17 years, and maybe

I forgot, even though the story he tells me should have made him recognizable to me. But even if he tells me a different story, I must believe he was there. Of course, where else could he have been? For if he weren't in the fruit market that day, he would have surely been caught and killed. He must have been there, witnessing each thing as I did: counting the dead, measuring the length of each torture session, observing the footwear and the ice, feeling the hunger, fear, and cold. But he tells me a slightly different story. In some places, *his memory comes in the way of my memory*.

There was massacre, he tells me.

Even though in his nightmare it is the cold of January that he experiences, he believes it was March, not January, and the ice had begun to thaw. The trees were still bare, but the birds were out and about. It was windy and the rain was lashing hard against soft earth. People used kangars for warmth only in the mornings and the evenings; the rest of the time they just supplied embers for hookahs. The days had grown longer and less frosty. He remembers loud knocks on his door around five in the morning (which is not far from what I remember); then glass smashing on the floor of the porch, a crunching of glass shards under heavy boots. The next moment, several thickset soldiers armed to the teeth were inside the house poking and kicking, and creating an uproar. He remembers walking out barefoot and half-sleepy in the still dim morning, cutting his feet on the glass shards on the porch. How could he forget, he still has *nishaan*, the marks, under his feet!

According to him, the puddles of icy mud were actually soft, not hard as I remember. He tells me he put his feet in the puddles to soothe the intense pain of the nasty cuts. The birds were not chirping, but they were flying around. He saw sparrows swoop down to the ground to pick worms. He tells me everyone was hit as they entered the fruit market, even children. He agreed we were all assembled in the fruit market. He remembers the dreadful pain as the bamboo stick hit his shins. He believes he was lifted off his feet and spun forward in the air a couple of times before landing on the tarred road on his back. People pulled him away before he was mauled any further. He remembers slithering to the centre of the market, and shouting slogans. 'Hum kya chahtay!' He seems to think that people enthusiastically responded: 'Azadi! Azadi!' And that soldiers had a hard time bringing things back under their control. He confirmed that he saw the open torture chambers; quite curiously he also called them 'theatres of terror.' He

remembers the 'cat' but tells me that the informer was holding lists of people and reading names out from it.

Now, I do remember someone saying later that somebody had been made to spin in the air like that. But except for the old man, who was hit across his face, and the sounds of torture and expletives, I didn't hear any one shouting slogans, or creating a pandemonium. He doesn't remember anyone else apart from himself starting the ruckus. About the old man who was hit in the face, he says he doesn't remember any such man. I couldn't confirm it with the old man because he passed away several years before I met the neighbour who urged me to write down his dream.

My neighbour remembers the stench in the market, but believes the smell was not rotten bananas or chemicals but of rotten eggs and rice which the soldiers deliberately spread to nauseate us – a somewhat implausible proposition as several soldiers were also standing by closely watching us, and they wouldn't discomfort themselves. He doesn't remember that only four people had been shot dead. He says several people died in the torture chambers.

He tells me someone had actually tried to grab a rifle, which caused mayhem and the soldiers started shooting uncontrollably. 55 people died, he says. I asked him if he was mixing up two different events: the crackdown on our neighbourhood and the infamous massacre at Bijbehera town, five miles away, three months previously in October 1993. In Bijbehera, 55 people had been shot dead when a peaceful procession, after Friday prayers, was machine-gunned by Indian soldiers. The Indian government claimed a young man who tried to grab a soldier's rifle provoked the massacre. My neighbour tells me no, he is not mixing it all up. He asked me to count the total number of people killed in our neighbourhood by soldiers. I counted the people who had been killed, at different times, over the previous 20 years. It came to 55. He insists they all died on that one day. Our memories had turned into fire.

There are others who were there that day, who accept parts of his story and parts of mine, while some have completely different stories of their own. All remember the torture, but there is discord over the season. Some even insist it was summer, and that it was unbearably hot. The truth is, after the first few years, the four seasons of the Kashmiri year, which used to bring unique and different joys and expectations, rolled into one single, spherical time of pain.

The Life of a Rebel Artist



MC Kash

Streets

My struggle to survive started when I was still in the womb of my mother. A day before I was born, my beautiful mother had to walk more than 10 miles on a hot summer day in May. Kashmiris were helpless when state-imposed curfews were announced, with no warning, back in 1990. Like thousands of other people of different professions, my mother was struck with this frightening news while she was at a government school, teaching. This painful journey through the roads of Kashmir, from Pampore to Dalgate, was a ghostly one. The silence was eerie, given that it was daytime. The empty streets were dotted by droves of Indian paramilitary troopers with livid expressions on their faces. And, for a woman, walking all alone under such conditions, every thought must have centred on death. I can only imagine what she felt while passing checkpoint after checkpoint, picket after picket, knowing that she held a life in her womb. My mother survived, though. *We* survived.

16 days after I was born, a prominent Kashmiri leader was shot dead. Then the Indian troopers opened fire on the mourning procession, leaving more than 50 people dead. I had barely opened my eyes and our world was consumed by fear and mourning.

Role playing is a part of everybody's childhood, and my big brother and I were no different. We instantly picked a word from the streets, which obviously sounded the most important, and shouted it with emotion and vigour: 'Azadi, azadi!' These were among the first words that emerged from my mouth.

There were other forms of performance too. Like creating ‘bunkers’ out of pillows and bed sheets. And shouting, ‘Boom! Boom! Grenade! You’re dead!’ That was our version of ‘Encounter, Encounter’. The real battle however waged outside – and it was no game. We grew up amidst gunshots and funeral processions; saw our neighbours mourning their dead sons. Women who used to pull our cheeks were now beating their chests and bemoaning their losses. They would never pull our cheeks again; they would just look with longing. I guess they changed after what had happened. In those days, everybody changed. Everything changed.

Dalgate seemed to have more graveyards than people or houses. Our little playing space was filled with tombs, one of which was eventually used as a ‘wicket’. Indeed, all the hills around us had rows of tombstones. If we stopped to stare, the hills looked like fields full of white flowers. Today, I wonder if I had grown up around far too many dead people. Perhaps I had.

The way I saw the dead changed when the martyrs’ graveyard was constructed. I was amazed at how much more respect these tombstones got than the other ones lying all around. A special boundary was created. After some time when the ‘sacrifices’ increased in number, a new, well-maintained graveyard took shape. Fresh flowers were placed on the graves every day, the fragrance pulling one towards the space. I guess, the hardest fact was that whenever you walked past the martyrs’ graveyard, it seemed to hold more epitaphs than the last time. Sometimes I would see an old man hugging a grave and crying his heart out. Sometimes it was just the martyrs, the wilting flowers, and the silence of their six-foot-deep abode.

A year after the emergence of the martyrs’ graveyard, my parents taught me Fateh, a prayer you recite in honour of the deceased. And so, whenever I walked past the martyrs’ graveyard, I would stop and recite the prayer. I was convinced that it wouldn’t be long before someone who loved me would be buried there as well. Mother says I was in shock for days. Sometimes I would run along the path on which my slain uncle had been carried. People died and the fear kept escalating. I was growing up too fast.

As time passed, I somehow got used to AK 47s staring at me, but it didn’t make the situation any easier. Those years were hard. One did not know which turn the war would take. People disappeared without a trace. Dead bodies in gunny bags were found almost everywhere. Men got assassinated, kidnapped, or tortured and maimed for life. I was way too young to understand the facts, but fear is one emotion that spares no age. It

creeps into your thoughts and occupies a home in your sub-conscious mind, refusing to leave.

After seeing other families getting torn apart in Dalgate, I appreciated the importance of family. Death taught me life. Life taught me the value of struggle. We struggled each time we confronted crackdowns. We never knew who would be next. Cramped in one room, my mother, my brother and I would stare at the soldiers as they ransacked everything that came into view. Dad, we sensed, was somewhere out there, walking in a line with his head down, muttering a prayer under his breath. Somehow, through it all, we survived.

Avoiding getting killed was one form of exertion. But there were other struggles too. Dad was posted as a doctor in SMHS Hospital and he must have seen many dead bodies there. Yet for him, the immediate, most relevant endeavour was to put food on the table.

After I had spent the first six years of my life in Dalgate, my parents finally decided to move. I guess they just got plain sick and tired of that one room. I had to leave all my friends behind, and most importantly my streets, but the thought of having our own house was tempting.

Even when I left Dalgate, I took those streets and those memories with me. I could not erase recollections of the martyrs' graveyard. I could not forget the hills, or that road that took me home. I would never forget the shortcut either. Nor did I forget the people, dead or alive. My experiences had left a scar, but even that scar was beautiful. It had to be. It was my childhood.

Our new home was a one-storey building with six rooms, more than enough for someone who had lived all his life in one. Compared to Dalgate, this place was quiet. No protests. No funeral processions. One rarely heard a grenade blast, just the occasional, distant rumble of automatic machine guns. In the new home, I heard birds chirping all day. It was quiet. Almost peaceful. Yet, lonely.

I had left all my friends in Dalgate and I had no intention of making new ones. Everything out here was different. The people, the kids, the environment; I just couldn't get used to it. It would have got unbearable had it not been for my brother. From teaching me how to hold a cricket bat, to teaching me little tricks to survive life, he was always there. Whether we were teasing each other, fighting each other or fighting for each other, we

were one. In the darkest of times, we would hug one another and go to sleep.

When dad bought us a bicycle, I went out exploring the streets. Bunkers, more bunkers. Concertina wire wrapped around walls, denying one freedom. Everything out here looked haunted. And those AK 47s were still pointing at your head.

Crackdowns happened in this part of Kashmir as well. Once during an early morning raid, a group of Indian army personnel barged into our home. My brother and I were sleeping when I heard noises and the moment I opened my eyes I saw them staring straight at us. Was I still in a dream? Was this a nightmare? I must have asked myself, 'Is this for real?' I stood up and was instantly asked a question, 'Where is your dad's gun?' I guess the fear was mutual. They expected every Kashmiri to possess a gun, while every Kashmiri expected them to be cruel and blind to common sense.

Save a small number of events of this nature, for the next few years of my life, I was lost in a quiet world.

Hip-Hop

My father possessed a treasure. A huge, well-kept treasure of cassettes. Right from old Bollywood songs to some 90s Hindi pop, from *ghazals* to rock, from country music to the Beastie Boys. Honestly speaking, when I discovered that treasure, I barely understood what music was. I used to get the words in an Urdu/Hindi song but the English tracks were devilishly hard to understand; at the same time, they were more catchy. My brother and I, we would hit some track on that old cassette player that we had and we would go jumping all around the room. But one track, over all others, held my imagination for years. Men speaking fast, real fast, not even singing but just speaking and fast. It was like nothing else I had heard. Those men were the Beastie Boys and the track was called 'No Sleep Till Brooklyn'. Those guitar riffs would make my adrenaline rush and those voices made me jump and hop around! That's how I was introduced to hip-hop. I didn't know, of course, that it was called hip-hop.

By the time I was 13, I had somehow got my hands on another cassette, though this time around, it happened at a school I went to. A friend, after a trip to Dubai, had brought along LPs of Eminem's *The Slim*

Shady and *The Marshall Mathers*. The genre on the album cover read – Rap/Hip-Hop. So finally, we had been formally introduced.

The moment I began playing those tapes, I was reminded of ‘No Sleep Till Brooklyn’. And it struck me – I had found another artist who played the same genre of music! I was glad. I mean, on the radio, you heard the same old stuff, the same old boring lyrics, the same old lovelorn people talking about how miserable they felt, repeating the same old ideas over and over. Hip-hop was different. It made you wanna rebel and speak up!

I remember listening to Eminem’s tracks and really just trying to figure out his words at first. He was funny, abusive, angry and hated. I don’t know why, but I could relate to it all – the fury, the rejection, the protest. Deep inside, I felt as if I had found a new beginning. I knew that hip-hop was what I would listen to for years to come.

Gradually, as CDs replaced cassettes, I started to seek out the music of more and more rappers. At 14, I was bunking tuitions and sneaking out to Lal Chowk. Of course, my parents would have disapproved; they never wanted us to go to Lal Chowk. They said it was dangerous. And rightly so, because you heard stories with alarming regularity of grenade blasts ripping apart shops, streets and people, or of encounters lasting for hours – it was just too much risk. But for music, for hip-hop, I disobeyed the norms set by my parents. Buying CDs that had anything to do with hip-hop, saving money and going straight out to buy another one – these undertakings defined my adolescence. And it was easy, because those pirated CDs were cheap. 30 bucks was something I could save out of my pocket money every week.

Two years of search had finally given me the music of 2Pac. Nothing remained the same after that. I used to listen to hip-hop, but the idea of rapping had never crossed my mind. 2Pac though was like a torch in a dark room. I was already writing random poetry, but it was 2Pac who opened up my heart to hip-hop and poetry, to people and the truth, to the beat of rebellion. Being a Kashmiri born in a war, I was bound to hate injustice as much as 2Pac hated the racism and police brutality he confronted. I could relate to the gospel he preached. I was inspired. A new chapter began in my life. I decided to rap.

In school, or anywhere else in Kashmir for that matter, not many people knew about hip-hop. Nobody was interested either. But I would still talk about it, even rap some stuff out to my friends. In private, of course.

You just didn't know how other people would react. Moreover, even back then, I wasn't a kid who would go up front and sing, or recite some poetry or take part in some school play. I was a shy boy who loved his small circle of friends.

Even while I grew up and stumbled into new hobbies, the situation in Kashmir did not change. People were perishing almost every day; death was all around. Blood was smeared across the walls. No matter who you were or what you did, you heard or read or knew of the brutality of war. You opened your eyes and breathed in the smell of rotting dead bodies; and with that, your innocence got murdered

For most of my life, I had lived with the looming prospect of getting caught in the crossfire. Running and hiding. Struggling and surviving. The war wasn't going to end, not in my best years at least. I had already lost my childhood, and my future seemed darker than the night sky my eyes once stared into. And yet, like so many others, I dared to live this life. I tried my best.

Each of us, in our own way, tries to cope with life in Kashmir. Some of us ignore what we encounter. But for how long can we dismiss reality? My honest effort at ignoring what was happening in Kashmir might have been successful for a couple of years. All because of hip-hop. I was rapping and learning at the same time. I had decided to still my thoughts in a beat. My research had already introduced to me greats like 2Pac, Nas, KRS One, Rakim, Biggie Smalls, The Roots, Talib Kweli, The Fugees, Dr Dre, Ice Cube, Eazy E, The Game, Mos Def, Common, Public Enemy (Chuck D), Wu Tang Clan... the list goes on and on.

Kashmir

The most important chapter of my life starts here. Hip-hop was my first love, but it brought me closer to an idea that I hold dearer than my life – the idea of Kashmir. The idea that I tried to run away from. As a young adolescent, I had thought that immersing myself in a beat might help me to avoid reality. Who would have guessed that one would bring me closer to the other?

I had begun recording some tracks on a friend's home computer. Every weekend, I would go down to this internet café in Raj Bagh and download

beats from various producers on the internet. I would come back home and, keeping the beat on loop, would jot my thoughts down in a diary, which I had affectionately and very properly named 'Rhyme book'. My struggle to get heard had started.

And yet again, my streets in Dalgate came calling.

On 8 January 2010, a 15-year-old boy was killed when Indian troopers fired at a crowd in Maisuma. Inayat Khan had just passed class 10 and was preparing for further studies by attending tuitions. While waiting for a bus home to Dalgate, Inayat was unwittingly caught in a skirmish between protestors and the CRPF. The CRPF fired live bullets at the crowd and Inayat, who was just a bystander, was shot in the thigh; he fell to the ground, crying for help. According to eyewitnesses, a CRPF Gypsy came speeding by and ran over his helpless body. If this wasn't enough, the Indian troopers got down from the Gypsy and stomped on Inayat till he lay dead.¹

Every man, woman and child was out there on the streets of my birth crying or wailing or just angry. The burial hadn't taken place. The police had kept Inayat's dead body in the Police Control Room and were not returning it to his family who had been asking for it since the catastrophe had unfolded. The situation was tense. Inayat's mother with a few other women had walked over to the posh residence of Omar Abdullah, on Gupkar Road, a few miles away from Dalgate, asking for her son's dead body to be returned. People were shouting slogans for azadi and in honour of the martyr. The irony was that the only UN office in Kashmir is exactly where the wailing crowd had gathered. The UN had its big blue doors shut.

Thousands of people had gathered for Inayat's funeral. Word was out that he was finally coming home. A grave had been dug and everybody was waiting. The 'last look' ritual was about to begin; Inayat's mother, father, sister, brother, cousins, friends would see him for a final time. Everybody had heard the police version by now. Their report mentioned that a car had run over Inayat, and that a stampeding crowd had trampled over his splayed body after the CRPF had 'fired in the air' to disperse them. I had come specifically to attend Inayat's funeral. When I went in to have a last look at his sleeping face, there was a size 10 military jackboot stamp on his chest.

The *Jinazah* (funeral prayers) had to be done quickly since the small streets of Dalgate couldn't hold so many people. While walking out to the

main road, where there was more space, men struggled to touch the coffin of a martyr. Just a touch. And I was one of them. I would have been honoured to shoulder his coffin too, but at that moment, in that seething sea of people, even a touch would have satisfied me. As I made my way forward, somehow, someone pushed me and suddenly I was shouldering Inayat's coffin. Those 10 seconds changed my life forever. In those 10 seconds, I had taken a vow.

Kashmir: The Vow

Inayat changed the way I looked at my life, every aspect of it. That day in Dalgate, as I carried the 15-year-old's body, I vowed to speak the truth about Kashmir, at all times, no matter the consequence. I was soon to learn of the joys and the satisfaction that came with being candid.

The protests on 8 January weren't new by any means; indeed, they highlighted the fact that the only way we could articulate our angst was by being out in the streets protesting, or in 2010, by stone pelting. All my life I had struggled to find a way to express myself as a Kashmiri. After Inayat's death, the way forward shone clear. I could voice my dissent through hip-hop. My poetry got deeper and deeper. I wasn't trying to copy the 'street Ebonics' of American emcees anymore. My lyrics gained in originality and began to develop a hint of consciousness.

After Inayat had been martyred, a bloodbath had taken place.² Teenagers, 8-year-olds, men, women, almost everybody was targeted by the Indian paramilitary forces. It didn't matter whether they were in the streets protesting, or bystanders, or just students looking out of windows. Bullets were fired without discretion, and were aimed at all Kashmiris, regardless of age. There were martyrs everywhere, and funeral processions were marked by wails and tears.

For me, 2010 brought back the visions of 1990. By September 2010, more than 60 young Kashmiris had lost their lives. Curfews were imposed. Roads were blocked. Strikes were called out by Kashmiri leaders. Food supply was short, even while Kashmiris ran out of rations. Schools, colleges, and various other institutions were closed for months on end. Every day, the local newspapers carried new pictures of slain teenagers. A 'normal' life seemed impossible. Despite the obstacles, protests continued,

even proliferating to social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. I wanted to play a part in this.

Earlier, with the help of a friend who had an internet connection at his house, I had been able to make a band page on Facebook and Reverbnation. I had recorded a couple of tracks back in April and I had decided to upload these; I believed social networking sites were the ideal platforms.

But since July, I hadn't been able to record any of my tracks. Curfews made it impossible to venture out of home, leave alone go to Srinagar in search of a studio. But when September came knocking, I knew I had seen enough. I began asking around for a studio and the friend who had assisted me with net access, helped me find a studio in Lal Chowk, which he said was the biggest in the whole of Kashmir!

As the first week of September started, I finished writing a song that I titled 'I Protest'. My only intention was to use hip-hop, my voice, and my thoughts in support of millions of Kashmiris who were in the streets protesting every day. I wanted to speak out against the atrocities, to be one with my people.

I knew that the first thing I had to do as soon as a post-curfew 'deal' was announced, was go to a studio and record. As the situation eased, I got a full day studio booking. The night prior, I stayed up, scanning newspapers from July to September, painstakingly writing down name after name. I decided to include the names of the martyrs and change the name of the track from 'I Protest' to 'I Protest (Remembrance)'.

Before starting the recording session, I had shown the studio people the lyrics of 'I Protest (Remembrance)'. They had to take a call on whether such a venture could be allowed on their premises. They didn't understand hip-hop or rap, but they did understand the consequences of what I was about to do. I remember asking them, 'Is it okay with you?' and within minutes I was in front of a microphone, recording. It was my first experience in a professional studio.

I released the track after a day or two, promoting it on my page and passing the link to people I knew. Until then, protest music in Kashmir was virtually unheard of. Perhaps that would account for the curiosity 'I Protest' generated. Within a few weeks, my song was everywhere, on cell phones, laptops, Facebook. I imagine, it was even with the police, who were probably intrigued.

As a Kashmiri, you had seen it happen before. People highlighting the truth about our land would be found shot dead and left to float in a gunny bag. I knew. I had understood the repercussions the moment I had written the first line of the song. The vow I had taken in Dalgate came to my rescue at that point of time. No matter what, come what may, I wasn't going to stop speaking the truth.

Kashmir: The Journey

Within a week of recording 'I Protest', I was back in the same studio recording 'Beneath This Sky'. I felt like I had very little time. I feared, sooner or later, somebody would knock at my door, drag me out of my house, bundle me into a Gypsy and take me to a place unknown. Maybe in my heart of hearts I was preparing myself for prison. Or worse.

'I Protest' didn't change my life. Inayat did. Kashmir did. And both of them gave my life a meaning, a cause. The moment I released 'Beneath This Sky', I was back writing a new song. I was determined to release it as soon as possible.

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- 1 'Protests Against Boy's Death in CRPF Firing', *The Tribune*, 9 January 2010 <<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2010/20100110/j&k.htm#1>> [accessed 17 March 2013].
 - 2 Bashir, Arif, 'Call to "Quit Kashmir" Amid Cries of Azadi', in *Current News* <<http://currentnews.in/?p=6983>> [accessed 18 March 2013].

I Live With the Dead



Atta Mohammad Khan

My name is Raja Atta Mohammad Khan and I am 70 years old. I have buried more than 235 bodies of unknown people. I was born in Tchahal village, Bimbyar, in Northern Kashmir. My father, Wali Mohammad Khan, was also from the same village. I had eight siblings – four brothers and four sisters; all my brothers and two sisters died due to illnesses. My father sent me to school. However, I could continue only till class three. I had to leave studies so I could help my parents with farming. My mother passed away after my marriage, when I had two children. Three years after my mother's death, my father also passed away. In those days I was a labourer earning 50 paisa per day.

I have four daughters and a son. I live with my son and wife. Those days were better than today. I am 70 years old and I don't like the contemporary world. Whatever is going on today is worse than the olden days.

I can't read or write very well. I can't write a letter. I can read Urdu a little. In cities gravediggers are paid for their work. But in villages nothing like that happens. We don't pay to dig graves. There is no particular person for digging graves here. Anyone digs a grave and buries the dead.

During times of militancy, our village was also facing the same conflict, but the militancy was not extreme. I have a small patch of land near my house where I used to work the whole day. One evening during the month of Ramzaan (a month of fasting for Muslims) in 2003, I was working in my fields, waiting for *Iftaar*. I saw a policeman coming towards me. He told me that a body needs to be buried. I told him that I was working in my fields, and could not do it and asked him to get someone else. But he didn't leave; instead he sat down beside me and started crying. He pleaded as he

could not find anyone to dig a grave. He was very tense, so I couldn't refuse him. I went home and got my digging tools.

In our village, we had a small piece of land, almost three kanals, marked as the ancestral village graveyard. During the construction of the Lower Jhelum Hydel Project (LJHP), half a kilometre away, the graveyard was filled with the dugout remains of the construction site, piled 10 feet high. There is a local hospital on one side of the graveyard.

I asked the policeman about the body and he said that it was of an Afghani militant who has been killed in Tangmarg, around 50 kilometres from Srinagar. I dug a grave in the ancestral village graveyard and buried the body. While digging the grave, my entire body was trembling. I couldn't sleep for the whole night. We couldn't recognise the Afghani militant. His face had been disfigured and there were severe burn marks on his neck and shoulders. After burying him I asked the policeman: Why did you bring the body here? He replied, 'We used to bury at Kichhama but there is no space left in the graveyard now.' Later I discovered that the Afghani militant was a native of Jal Sheeri, Varmul. His name was Bashir Ahmad Dar.

I can never forget that first day I buried a body. Over the years, most of the corpses have been from Tangmarg, Kreeri, Sopore and Gulmarg. I have been the only caretaker of the graveyard and I hold every story deep inside my heart. I haven't forgotten anything, even though many years have passed. The world only hears about what happened here, but it is only Allah and I who know what I have seen and been through.

The army used to hand over bodies to local police stations and the policemen had to bury them. The policemen in turn used to come to gravediggers like me with the bodies. From 2003, the brutal period started, which lasted till 2006. It used to be one body, three bodies or sometimes more than six per day. It continued for years and I would bury them here in the same graveyard.

One day the police brought two bodies. Both corpses had torture marks and bruises all over. I could see their bones. Even today, after so many years, I remember looking at those bodies. It was painful to witness all of that. They looked like twin brothers in their early 20s. When I returned home after burying them I couldn't stop myself from weeping. Almost everyone in my village started calling me a police agent. But this never stopped me from burying the dead. How could I let the bodies decay by not burying them?

The police would come at midnight, sometimes early morning, to hand over the bodies to me. After every burial I would go home and wash my blood-drenched clothes. Most of the dead had multiple bruises and some had even partly decomposed. The bullet wounds, torture marks and the scary appearance of the bodies are still afresh in my mind. They were young men drenched in blood. It was very depressing to look at their faces. No one in the village had the courage to see the corpses, not even the policemen, so it was very difficult to bury them. No one volunteered to help. People used to say they would get nightmares if they looked at the carcasses. Later, only young men from the village came to help.

One day the police came in a Gypsy along with the local SHO. They were around ten men and they had five bodies in gunny bags. I broke down on seeing that. I told the SHO that I wouldn't bury them. I said, do it yourself. He replied, '*Humko azad karo.* (Free us.)' Those five bodies were of young men. I was not scared. Never. It was something else. I cannot put into words what I felt when I had to look at those bodies.

I used to get a local cleric to hold funeral prayers before burials. The police made me sign some papers too. Whatever I could do, I did. One day nine bodies came. It was the last time. They were from Boniyar. One of them was from our own village. The villagers identified him. I was told by the police to dig nine graves, which I did. I completed digging at night, when I got a message from one of my relations that I needed to go to Zainpora, where my relatives live. I had been handed over four bodies and five still lay in some forests. I left for Zainpora and later when I came back I saw that the police had buried all nine bodies. The villagers told me that one of the dead was my nephew, Saleem. I hadn't see his corpse. But they knew it was him. Saleem's father identified his photograph after two days and I came to know he had been buried in one of those nine graves.

I remember meeting Saleem one last time before he died. He had come to my house. We had tea together and then he left. He was my sister's only son and I did not know whether he had become a militant or they just killed him. Another body among those nine was also identified. That boy was from Guatamala; his family was informed. They came and took his body. That night eight bodies were buried along with my nephew's.

The year Benazir Bhutto was assassinated, I went to visit my relatives in Pakistan. My family and I spent a month there. In that one month, the

police had buried around 30-35 bodies in the graveyard. Then after some time they brought one more body and buried it.

A few weeks later, I went to the police station and told the officers not to bring any more bodies, as there was no space left in the graveyard. Since then no corpses were brought here. They might have found another place. There must be some other gravedigger like me doing the same work I did.

Those days were brutal. I have not slept since then. I still live in the past, with those bodies. Everyone I have ever buried is always in front of my eyes. They haunt me. I can see their faces. I can never forget the condition of those bodies. I remember all those moments, the sound of the earth as I covered the graves and corpses and their mutilated faces. It is all in my mind. I cannot forget those mothers who wandered in search of their sons and never found them. My memory is all that I have. Actually, these are not memories. I still live them.

Sometimes relatives of those who have disappeared visit the graveyard and cry while looking at the burial place. They ask me how the corpses looked when I buried them. They ask where they were hit by bullets or if they had any marks of torture on their bodies. But how do I answer them? What can I tell? I am very tired now. I don't like to talk to people who ask me questions about what happened here. I have spoken several times about it, but there has been no result. While these graveyards have been exposed, not even a single corpse has been identified. I wish these bodies, buried in this graveyard, could be acknowledged, named, so their loved ones could find out about them. So far, only a few bodies, around five – I don't remember well – have been identified.

While suffering from ill health, when I went to doctors, I didn't tell them this story of my life. I am restless. When a bullet is fired it doesn't see who it hits. Blood used to be on my body, on my clothes, on my face. I always thought my profession was work for Allah and a way to heaven. I feel as though I am in shock. I cannot forget the body of a boy, around 18 years of age. He was killed in Sopore. He was hit on the left side of his chest; five policemen had brought his body. The policemen told me to keep his wrist-watch but I didn't keep it. I told them, what would I do with this watch when it didn't help this boy?

I don't go back to the graveyard now. It reminds of everything that I saw. One day, there was a body of a young man. I buried him. He had been hit by a volley of bullets on his chest. A little later, his family got to know

about his killing and his brother arrived to take his corpse. I dug the grave, and what we found was surprising. Only the clothes remained, but not the body. He was gone. It is a mystery. We don't know what happens to us after life. Maybe they were all martyrs.

Everyone I buried died because of the same cause, the ongoing struggle in Kashmir. I feel honoured that I was the person who buried them. I pray for all of them. I respect all those I buried in this graveyard. I don't know what will happen to me after death. But what I did is the only thing I could have done at that time.

(As told to and transcribed by Fahad Shah.)

Mausoleum of Memory, Portrait of Resistance



Uzma Falak

She is working on her *yaendar* (spinning wheel). The green paint in her room looks old, perhaps tired of hiding the walls beneath. The paint has peeled off in patterns – countries, islands, faces, rivers. The only sound in the room, where she lives alone in North Kashmir's Varmul, is the squeaking of the wheel. She carefully, slowly, spins the wheel with her right hand while handling the yarn with her left; the veins of her hands stand out.

She is bespectacled. The silver *tilla* embroidery on her summer pheran has tarnished. Each turn of the wheel, it seems, makes her content. She talks feebly, as if calculating loss with every syllable. She remembers the dates, the time, and dreams *revolution*.

Having lost her six sons and husband to it, she still utters the word 'revolution' in a reassuring tone – her voice resonating with the sound of the spinning wheel – 'Azadi!'



The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.

– Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

Quite early on, I learnt the word 'saalon'. The men in uniform would drunkenly shout out 'Saalon!' in the streets at night, shaking me from my dreams. They would slam the doors, the windows. I would pretend that I was not listening. I was not there. I was not me. I was not.

My cold feet would search for a warm corner in the bed. And then in a hushed voice, I would imitate them. I would mutter, 'Saalon-saalon' till it made me exuberant and I would fall sleep.

Occupation engulfed our lives. Thinking of it floods the mind with memories, neatly spliced moments – distinct and vivid.



I remember the summer of 1996 when I was in the second standard, when I made my first step towards insubordination. Defeated, I returned, but not defeated in spirit.

I remember that as we approached the small bridge leading to my house, there was a huge crowd of men squatting. Much to my annoyance the three of us slowed down – my father and I, and a doll with fixed blue eyes that we had gone out to buy. Walking at a snail's pace, tightly holding my father's hand, I saw men in uniform, their rifles pointed towards the sky. My father whispered: 'Crackdown!' I barely understood the word then.

The forces had cordoned off the area where our home was located. The menfolk were asked to assemble outside as troopers went to search the houses. The excitement of unpacking and combing my doll's tresses faded abruptly. Instead, I thought about my mother and brothers alone in the house – crouched and huddled, speaking in hushed voices in the room where the window opens to a military bunker.

My father wanted me to go home. He knew he wouldn't be allowed to cross the bridge, but he presumed that I, being a child, would be allowed. Swinging the doll in my hand, I made my way through the huge crowd, up to a burly man, wearing a black bandana and green canvas shoes. He was stationed just outside my house. He spoke before I could. '*Wapis jao. Wapis.* (Go back.)'

My eyes were fixed on the window of my house. My mother, who was at the window, joined me in my plea, so I could enter my dwelling. The man's reply was a shriek that terrified us both. I returned to my father, defeated.

The sun was setting as we walked back to a night's stay at a relative's house, away from the crackdown. While the birds squawked as they returned to their nests, I thought of my brothers playing scrabble without me, under candlelight. How I wanted to show them my doll! I hadn't unpacked her. That night I kept thinking about my home in captivity. Perhaps this was when I first understood occupation – when hatred for the occupier, the urge to insult him, make fun of him, and the dream of seeing

an unoccupied home (I hadn't come to grips with the concept of homeland then), of walking without being followed by those bloodshot eyes, translated itself into resistance.

Wapis jao, wapis, I wanted to tell him.

There was fear too. On one of the search operations when they first barged into my house, I hid in my grandmother's cloak. I didn't want to see their eyes. But fear only strengthened resistance.



Wild flowers surround a grave – bud
buried in the school yard,
silent.

Cracks in mud walls deepen,
as his mother kisses his last memory;
a dim photo in a shroud.
His room – a shrine!

School bag and clothes – relics; treasured!¹

A few months after Palhallan in North Kashmir was placed under siege for nearly two months, I visited the hamlet. Sitting on the porch, I saw Syeda silently watching the rain. Her son, Adil Ramzan, a 12-year-old, was killed in 2010 when government forces waged a war against the people.²

In her pheran pocket she had carefully secured two photographs in a white envelope. 'This was his new uniform. He had just worn it twice,' she said while pointing to a picture of Adil sporting a neat haircut, wearing a light pink shirt and school tie. She looked at it intently. And then put it back. Finally she pulled out a hazy photo, perhaps taken with a mobile phone – her son in a shroud, only his face visible, calm, as if asleep.

Adil was shot when he was watching an azadi procession. For quite some time the government forces didn't allow anyone to lift him. Later, when he was shifted to hospital, his family says, the army barged in and shot him again. Some boys managed to take his body home, braving the harsh curfew. The stretcher on which he was brought remained in the courtyard for over a month, reinforcing their painful memories.

'Azadi is a great blessing.... My son's life for the freedom struggle is not a loss,' his father told me.

While Adil's parents recollect his living memories, his three siblings have stored his books, school bag, uniform and other belongings in a safe corner in the room that he shared with them. Suraya, his sister, brought Adil's school notebook, now only a memento. 'Explain Liberty, Justice and Sovereignty'... He had answered the question in a neat handwriting. One has to pay a heavy price in this land on engaging with such words.



Milan Kundera in his *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* writes:

You begin to liquidate a people... by taking away its memory. You destroy its books, its culture, its history. And then others write other books for it, give another culture to it, invent another history for it. Then the people slowly begin to forget what it is and what it was. The world at large forgets it still faster.³

The occupier's attempts are always directed towards wiping out a collective memory, an entire history, a shared dream. The act of remembering or preserving memory through memorabilia, writing, painting, singing, theatre, or just dealing with it every moment through silence, prayers, even curses, challenges grand state-backed narratives. Preserving memory creates a space which cannot be occupied. Waging war against forgetfulness then becomes an act of dissent.

11-year-old Danish had to go underground in 2010 as the State saw him as a 'threat'. His family members were arrested and harassed by the forces. He and his 20-year-old friend and neighbour, YakooB Bhat were chatting outside their home in uptown Bemina in Srinagar when forces shot Bhat dead. While Danish (who has an uncanny resemblance to cricketer Brett Lee) was on the run for protesting on the streets during the civil uprising, he treasured the shell of the bullet that had killed his friend, as a keepsake. But weeks later, he had to abandon the memento as the forces intensified their search for him and his parents thought that the shell case would only add to his trouble. The children of conflict grow up differently. They grow up fast.⁴



As a young girl I found escape in books, writing a 'Dear Diary', or repeating the *Saen Kissar* folk stories my grandmother would narrate. During harsh winter evenings, made darker and colder by frequent power

cuts and gunshots which echoed in the dead of night, Enid Blyton, and those cheap abridged versions of books by Mark Twain and Charles Dickens lulled me to sleep. I read about children merrily riding bicycles along the lake, whistling and singing country songs which contrasted with my own grim childhood.

My brother and I would go up to the attic and peek outside through the bullet holes in the window. We collected not shells or stones, but used bullets.

When nine-year-old Sameer Rah was killed ruthlessly by the Indian troops, I was hysterical.⁵ I couldn't keep to myself, the space seemed to constrict my being, and a force within beckoned me to go out on the road. It was 11 pm. My father accompanied me. I stood out in the dark watching the procession, his mother, and the burning tyres. *The city is a carcass. The city is an asylum.*⁶

Those were times when each hour would announce death and I would note in my book, the name, the date, counting, remembering. The oppressors even denied us grieving – our resistance. The picture of government forces beating a father clinging to his dead son, reminds us of our identity, of who we are and what we are repelling.

Fancy Jan fell to a bullet fired by the government forces in 2010 when the Valley saw mass uprisings and over 120 people lost their lives. She was fixing curtains to keep the tear gas smoke away. The government said it was a 'stray' bullet. A soon-to-be bride, her last cry was: '*Mummy mei aaw heartas fire!* (Mummy a bullet has pierced my heart!)'⁷

My brother, fearing for the safety of a neighborhood child protesting Fancy's death, asked him to go home. The boy asked: 'They killed her. Wasn't she our sister?' That night my brother played blues on his guitar till dawn, and I knew he was remembering and so was I. In my room, Fancy's eyes in the photograph speak to me, as if to say: Remember.

Like a witness I say, 'I do. I do. I do.'

And then there are memories for which words fail me.



'What should I say? What should I say?' she repeats. 'All has been said. What should I say?'

An all-embracing silence has engulfed Rubina. In this silence, echo memories of her only son, Tufail.

TUFAIL MATOO, 17, DEAD. (Tufail was shot by the government forces in June 2010.)

Rubina walks into the room with the blue-washed walls, with heavy soundless steps. Her pale face is a portrait of silence. I can't find words either. What should I ask her? What will she say? She lifts her hands now and then to clear the shining beads of sweat on her face. She is not numb. When warm silent tears stream from her eyes, one knows she is not numb.

A five-rupee coin and a fistful of summer grass clutched in his left hand were his possessions when he was found lying on the playground. The things Tufail touched have become souvenirs and she tries to find traces of him in them. She clings to his shirt and won't put it away. His room remains as it was. His belongings untouched – the study table, computer, photographs; his remembrances.

She sketches her son with the silent colours of memory. Silence, it seems, has strengthened its roots like the weeds in their garden left untended. Silence seems to be her protest against the rhetoric of the oppressor and it defeats the culture of silence forced upon us by the state. Even in her silence one can hear the rhythms of resistance – the will to remember, live, and not forget.

Silence is the trace of something unspeakable, perhaps intractable, maybe unreasonable too, in a place where reason is dictated and defined by the oppressor to justify oppression.



In 2010, my mother, Ameer, would be silent most of the time. At other times, she would be quite impatient. Then one day I found her praying alone. Her prayers invoked the names of the dead. Her face was calm. She recalled the names slowly, with patience.

The next day, she called me to her room and read a poem she had written for the dead – for us, for our slaughtered childhood, for our garrisoned lives. Her thoughts, after many years, had kissed paper only to remember and remind us of loss, and reinforce resistance. In a strange way, they kept the dead alive. As she read, she made a failed attempt to hide her tears. I had lost the fight already.

This moment took me back to the day in my childhood when I first witnessed Ameer's defiance during one of the search operations. *Talashi!* All the men were taken out except for my grandfather who didn't keep well and couldn't move. My grandmother made him lie on the bed and tucked him in, like a child.

They barged in all at once, a swarm. They didn't take off their boots. I was standing in the corridor, stealing glances. My mother always seemed fearless; at least she pretended to be. She had to pretend. She took all the keys and began opening every room, every cupboard and every box. All the doors were open. The coziness of our residence was laid bare. My chambers of secrecy held no treasures now. There was no 'home'.

As they searched each room, every cupboard, each shelf, pushed aside every curtain, lifted off the flooring, this thought would scurry around my mind like a rat, and my heart would pound unusually hard: What if they found what they were searching for? In some corner, on some shelf, in some dog-eared, torn page of a book, in some utensil, under some carpet, behind some door. I would worry about my own self: Can they read my mind? Do they scrutinise hearts as well?

I was following the trail of the jackboots when my mother stopped them from entering a room which sheltered the Quran. She explained to a trooper that they couldn't go ahead with their boots on.

I wished for her to be quiet. How could she defy them? I now realise that resistance comes naturally to women in this place.

They did not find anything. They could never barge into my dreams.



Hajra was praying when I entered the room. She only wished she could see her son in her dreams. Just once. A glimpse.

She lost her son Inayatullah, in 2006, when CRPF personnel who occupied a building just opposite their house in Munawarabad, Srinagar, shot him dead. A music composer by profession, he was partially handicapped for some time. On the evening of 30 June, he came out of his house to take a walk when the government forces opened fire on him. Though the police registered a murder case, it failed to initiate proceedings against the accused troops, for want of sanction from New Delhi, which invoked AFSPA.⁸

As she folded her prayer rug she remarked, ‘Who would I seek justice from?’

I am reminded of Faiz Ahmed Faiz:

Facing those power-crazed that both prosecute
and judge, wonder
To whom does one turn for protection, from whom
does one expect justice?

In a place where injustice is institutionalised and the deliverance of justice is in the hands of the state that perpetuates crime, the idea of ‘God as witness’ provides solace to many. ‘There are countless pending cases and everyone knows the fate they meet. Allah is the witness and that is the only consolation,’ says Fancy’s brother.

Prayers are an act of resistance too – a cry for justice in a place where justice has become a utopian goal. Prayer reinforces memories. Prayer provides catharsis. Hajra tells me with conviction, ‘I pray for justice. I seek their punishment, those who killed my son. Prayers give me strength. We can’t be wronged. For how long... can’t happen... never.’ When resistance manifests itself in prayers, mosques become spaces of solidarity. In 2010, during harsh curfews, mosques were the only spaces where people could come together. Here, people could express solidarity, articulate pain, hope, even despair.

But government forces didn’t spare even such rare assemblies. In Palhalan, eight people were killed in 2010, the youngest being a 12-year-old. The forces went on a rampage outside the Abu Ala Mosque. The assembly in prayer was disturbed as people rushed out of the mosque to find safe corners. The forces opened fire, leading to the death of a youth, Ansar. The bullet holes on the tin-door of the mosque stand testimony to the terror unleashed on a caged people.⁹



In a society like Kashmir, riddled with fear and suspicion, dissent has always been crushed and voices stifled.¹⁰ But when resistance becomes a part of daily existence, it turns into a force that can’t be repressed. It speaks to the world in a way that is impossible to curb, control or orchestrate. For,

the battle is in an arena which the oppressor cannot touch. What can aggravate the oppressor more than passive resistance?

In oppressed societies, memory becomes a political tool. The memory of the oppressed is a form of collective consciousness – a means of resisting oppression.

In the absence of a free homeland, Memory becomes the homeland – unoccupied, free, unassailable.

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- 1 The lines are from the author's blank verse, *Immortal Flowers*, dedicated to Adil Ramzan, a 12-year-old, the youngest killed in Palhalan in North Kashmir in 2010 by government forces.
 - 2 Rafiq, Zahid, 'They Call Palhalan the "Kandahar of Kashmir". Here is Why it Might Yield New Recruits for Militancy', *Tehelka*, 11 December 2010 <http://archive.tehelka.com/story_main48.asp?filename=Ne111210They_call.asp> [accessed 17 March 2013].
 - 3 Kundera, Milan, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (UK: Faber and Faber, 1996), p 218.
 - 4 Chopra, Anuj, 'Stones are Kashmir's Weapon of Dissent', *The National*, 27 September 2010 <<http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/south-asia/stones-are-kashmirs-weapon-of-dissent>> [accessed 17 March 2013].
 - 5 Wani, Arif Shafi, '9-Year-Old Was Beaten to Death by Troops', *Greater Kashmir*, 11 August 2010.
 - 6 The lines are from the author's unpublished prose poem, *Till Then the Roads Carry Her*.
 - 7 Shaikh, Aalia, 'Fancy Jan: Death Wafts through Curtains', in Kashmir Dispatch <<http://www.kashmirdispatch.com/feature/06074430-fancy-jan-death-wafts-through-curtains.htm>> [accessed 17 March 2013].
 - 8 Usman, Sheikh, 'From Singer to a Victim of Fake Encounter', in The Kashmir Walla, 8 October 2012 <<http://www.thekashmirwalla.com/2012/10/from-singer-to-a-victim-of-fake-encounter>> [accessed 17 March 2013].
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The Disobedient Spring



Farrukh Faheem

The harsh winter of 2009 is coming to an end. White patches of snow in the courtyard gradually make way for greener spring grass. Although the *ymberzal* (daffodils) are in full bloom, it is a very different spring here. There are no kites struggling to fly high in the sky, against the backdrop of the mountains. The mountains, in turn, are now occupied by the Indian armed forces. The naked trees by the foothills cannot hide the ugly olive green bunkers and the glare of the concertina wires.

I am visiting my friend's place in Kadipora. This is his story. And mine.



My neighbourhood, largely home to the immigrants from the countryside, was close to Kadipora, the oldest locality of our town Islamabad in the southern part of Kashmir. Boys from our area would often go with the children from Kadipora to the nearby mountain. During Navroze the whole locality wore a festive look with the *badamwari* (almond garden) in full bloom. Lanes and by-lanes of Kadipora used to be abuzz with life, with kite-makers doing brisk business. It was an unending maze of alleys surrounded by age-old houses attached to each other, as if supporting within the burden of crumbling structures and the memories of an eventful past. A cursory look at Kadipora would reveal striking windows with intricate woodwork, and the old *deb* (Kashmiri balcony) where one could often see women endlessly gazing at the blue sky.

For our immigrant locality, Kadipora was the microcosm, where we would often go to take a dip in a fresh water spring or to throng the nearby shrine on Thursdays to eat our favourite *taher* (yellow rice), made on special occasions and distributed among the devotees. I have fond

memories of the kite-makers of Kadipora with their colourful little shops, and of the women sitting on the porch chatting and wrapping candies for the newly opened toffee factory. On other occasions, one could see these women drying vegetables in the alleys to make pickles or cleaning dishes at the community water tap with children playing around. The backstreets of this area served as annexes to house compounds or as extensions to a home's private space, away from the gaze of the main street that opened to the bazaar.

Life in Kadipora revolved around the local shrine, the three springs, the nearby mountain and the kite-makers. After every harsh Kashmir winter, which forced the inhabitants to remain indoors, the approaching spring always came with the warmth of life and hope. The young inhabitants of Kadipora would often fly kites or go on a *phuliya* (spring picnic) to the nearby almond hill to celebrate the arrival of the refreshing season. But the spring of 1984 and of the years that followed were different in Kashmir.

Kadipora has always been at the forefront of Kashmiri resistance with Mahaz-e-Raishumari (The Plebiscite Front) in the 1950s, People's League in the 1970s and the underground JKLF in the early 1990s. The locality has been witness to three generations of political resistance in Kashmir. For the inhabitants of this place then, a picnic to the mountain, playing cricket and football at Maile Maidaan, the flat grazing ground on the hilltop, a dip in the spring or eating *taher* at the local shrine used to be a part of everyday existence, even while there were political tremors outside.

As a young teenage boy growing up in Kashmir, I had always been attracted to this neighbourhood. Boys from our area often envied the street-smartness of Kadipora boys, the legendary sportsmanship of their cricket team 'The Young Kadipora' and their adventures around the mountain and the shrine.

My friendship with boys from Kadipora began in our school named after the famous Italian educator, Maria Montessori. Owned by a wealthy Kashmiri Pandit from Srinagar, the Montessori School was housed in a mediocre, six-room rented building in the heart of Islamabad town. Although it touted itself as the only English medium school in town, students often communicated in their mother tongue, Kashmiri. Having been born in middle-class, suburban families, English was all Greek to us. I remember how during the routine morning assembly prayer, we couldn't follow even a word of 'All Things Bright and Beautiful'. Every morning, as

a matter of routine, when our prayer leaders would recite the first line of this popular poem written by the Irish poet, Cecil Frances Alexander, all of us would be expected to repeat in unison ‘All Things Bright and Beautiful’. And the word ‘beautiful’ in our typical Kashmiri accents echoed in air as ‘boootifull’.

But at the end, there was something else that we were expected to recite loudly. It was the pledge: ‘India is my country, all Indians are my brothers and sisters, I love my country and am proud of its riches.’ The moment the prayer leaders uttered the words, ‘India is my country’, the whole assembly would murmur, ‘India is *not* my country’. The Kadipora boys, admired for their impeccable sporting abilities, were at the forefront of this chorus and it seemed, of the entire prayer they only understood the English words that formed a part of this pledge. I could clearly read the defiance in the eyes of young Bilal Bhat (the Wasim Akram of our school), and a host of other faces standing in the assembly for the routine morning prayer.

The rebellious nature of the young boys from Kadipora also attracted the attention of girls in our school. Bilal Bhat was their hero. A fast-bowler who loved to imitate the run-up of the famous Pakistani pace bowler, Bilal was a tall young boy with a steady gaze. From participating in the school football match to organising a school picnic, he always led from the front. It was Bilal who first taught me how to swim in a local pool. In summer, we would often bunk our classes for a swim. As time passed, Bilal and I got closer. We would share our lunch packs during the recess in the school. He used to like my working mother’s bread omelette more than his more traditional rice and *hakh* (collard greens).

In the meantime, our lives were transforming faster than we had imagined. We were slipping into adolescence; and the world seemed to shift with us. The defiance that I read in the eyes and the faces in the morning prayer assembly at our school was now visible on the streets of Kashmir. Week after week, seas of people filled the town-square, marching and raising slogans. One could see young boys, who earlier inhabited the cricket playground, crowding the streets, leading marches, raising slogans in a manner reminiscent of our school prayers. The team leader would ask: ‘*Aayeen Hindustaan ka?* (Indian Constitution?)’ And the people would respond in unison: ‘*Manzoor nahi, manzoor nahi!* (We shall not accept, we shall not accept!)’

‘Hum kya chahtay?’

‘Azadi... azadi!’

Whenever the azadi *jaloos* (freedom march) passed a locality, the people from that area hosted us. We would get free *rooh afza*, soft drinks and *taher*. Older women with folded hands praying for our safety would often peep from their balconies. It seemed as if the whole town was now a shrine where people were distributing food and drinks among the devotees, amidst the chants of azadi... azadi....

Each day the ongoing freedom marches added new words to our conversations. We got to know what ‘firing’ meant when a teacher from a rival school in the town was shot dead near the town-square by the Indian army. Very soon, more English words found their way into our vocabulary. ‘Crackdowns’, ‘ambush’ and ‘torture’ were a part of our language and our lives.

Our world – Kadipora, the locality which always wore a festive look – was suddenly a contested site. Like many other areas in Kashmir witnessing month long curfews and dawn-to-dusk crackdowns, Kadipora was now a ghost town. Everything changed. The shops in our neighbourhood didn’t open for months together. The local *kandur* (baker) gradually shifted his wares to his house. Life moved from the outside bazaar to the insides of the locality. The long labyrinth of backstreets was now our new marketplace. It was our only lifeline to survive the long spell of curfews, which often led to a shortage of essentials.

The circulation of local newspapers was badly hit when the journalists covering a crackdown in Srinagar – in which Indian armed forces were accused of molesting women – were thrashed by the military. Our local baker, who we used to visit in the mornings to pick up fresh *lavase* (Kashmiri bread) for breakfast, was our only source of news.

Whenever schools opened we would talk about crackdowns and killings. We would often participate in the protest marches across the town and share our little stories of valour. We would talk about the school teacher, Munaaf *Sebe* (Mr Munaaf) and how he got martyred by a gunshot while he was running away, when the freedom march reached the town-square and the Indian armed forces opened fire in the air to disperse the marchers. A senior school mate from my neighbourhood cautioned us: ‘You are not supposed to run if they shoot in air.’

Exactly three days after Munaaf Sebe's *shahadat* (martyrdom), our neighbour's son, Saja (short for Sajad), a young boy with curly hair in his teens, was dragged out of the cricket ground and shot dead. He was the first *shaheed* (martyr) from our locality. Our *darasgah* (community reading room where we used to get our Koran lessons) was named Shaheed Sajad Ahmed Darasgah (Martyr Sajad Ahmed Reading Room).

In the meantime, Kadipora had just witnessed a massive crackdown. We were all curious, and longed to know what had happened. The local baker's shop only provided vague snippets of information.

The crackdown had a ripple effect on our neighbourhood too. The government school building close to Bilal's house was turned into an interrogation centre. After the muezzin's call to morning prayer, the mosque loudspeakers announced that there was a crackdown. Women were asked to stay indoors while men were ordered to assemble in the graveyard. We were all there: Sajad's father, our baker, the owner of the grocery shop, the tailor in the street, the Masterji who taught in the nearby primary school – all of us. KK, the auto-rickshaw driver who had joined the protestors, was taken into the school and tortured. We could hear him scream. Everyone assembled in the graveyard was anxious. Next we saw KK coming out of the school, limping towards us; he sat right next to the baker's son, Iqbal. Iqbal was a 13-year-old boy who loved to fly kites and play football. Within no time, Indian soldiers picked Iqbal; we could clearly hear him scream inside the school too. After sometime KK got up, looked around and sat next to Showket, the grocer's son. Showket was picked by the Indian soldiers and taken to the nearby school. Before we knew what was happening, around 20 young boys were picked up from the graveyard. KK was the *cat*, the informer. When Bilal narrated this turn of events at school, I could hear the general expression of displeasure from my friends, especially as the word 'cat' was uttered. 'Mukhbir!' they muttered.

During the initial phase of the *tahreek* (the movement) young men were often picked up for questioning and were beaten by the Indian army; the elderly were spared. But after some years this changed. In yet another crackdown clamped in the spring of 1992, the whole town was asked to assemble at the football stadium in the heart of the Islamabad. I remember soldiers pushing old men, shouting: '*Ye budeye log bhi sab ugarwadi hain! Nikalo salun ko!* (Even these old men are terrorists, take them away!)' Our school drawing teacher Abdus Salam, our uncles, and the kite-maker from

Kadipora – everyone was there, tired and anxious. The stadium was packed with people. The player's gallery in the southern quarter of the stadium – where football players used to take their refreshments – was converted into a makeshift torture cell. One by one, young boys were being picked from the crowd and herded towards the player's gallery. We could see women endlessly pleading with soldiers asking for the release of their children. As soon as armed soldiers caught hold of Ashfaq, the kite-maker's son, his mother shouted at the soldier and caught him by his collar. Other women joined her and within no time the whole stadium was echoing: Azadi... azadi. Many women started hurling kangars at the Indian soldiers. Some women rushed towards the player's gallery breaking the army cordon that encircled the makeshift torture cell. With the Indian soldiers chased out, scenes of sobbing mothers hugging their bruised and tortured children filled the stadium.

Some months later as Bilal, another friend and I were sitting on the back bench of our eighth grade classroom writing our English B exam papers and trying to come to terms with the scorching heat of the August sun. The school bell rang. It was already four and we quickly picked up our bags, grabbed an ice-cream from the local Polka ice-cream vendor, just outside our school and rushed back home. In the morning when I went to pick up some lavasa from the local baker's shop, people were talking about how Bhat Sebe's son had been picked up by the army.

It took me a while to understand that the Mr Bhat they were talking about was actually the father of our own Wasim Akram. Bilal Bhat had been taken by the army. Rashid, the baker, closed his eyes, and while tossing out a hot lavasa from the red-hot tandoor with two long iron rods, said: 'They say Bilal was on his way back from his school. The army had an altercation with some boys and they started chasing them. Bilal was picked up by the Indian army just outside his house, while he returning.'

After week long search, his father Abdul Rahim Bhat was able to trace Bilal in what was called the Joint Interrogation Centre in the outskirts of Islamabad town in Khanabal. A 10-room hostel building for the tribal Gujjar and Bakarwal students had been converted into a zone of torture.¹

When Bilal was released, I visited him, and he was lying on his back in the middle of the room. He tried to get up from his bed to hug me. He couldn't. We shook hands and tears rolled down our eyes. 'They beat me up on the road and pushed me inside the *rakshak* (the armored vehicle) as soon

as you left,' he said. There was a strange silence between us. 'I was immediately blindfolded. Before I knew what was going on, I heard an authoritative voice asking me: Where are you from? I replied "Kadipora sir." The moment I said Kadipora, they didn't waste time. They immediately removed my blindfold and pushed me inside a dark room.' He continued after a long pause, 'There were other boys in the room, I knew one of them from Mattan Sports.' Soldiers would take turns to call them to the adjoining room and start beating them one by one. 'I could clearly hear the screams from the adjoining room.' Another pause. 'After sometime, two soldiers entered our room and asked me to follow them. Pointing to the boy from Mattan Sports, I tried to argue, "I am a student. Sir, *ye mujhe jaanta hai, hum log pahaad pay ek saath circket khailte hain. Maine kuch nahi kiya sir.* (He knows me, we play cricket together on the mountain.)" The second soldier took me by my arm and said, "*Salay wahin to tum log training layte ho!* (That is the place where you rascals get your training!)"

The whole locality had assembled at Bilal's house to see him. Women from the neighbourhood would come inside the room where we were sitting, kiss his forehead and bless him a long and healthy life. His mother, who accompanied these women, poured some tea for us, before leaving us alone. Once again there was a long silence in the room before Bilal continued, 'You remember Khursheed, that auto-rickshaw driver's son who used to sell ice-cream near the stadium? They beat him badly and put needles inside his genitals. I was sitting next to him in the dark room before he was taken to the adjoining room. Then they called me.' I looked into Bilal's eyes. I felt a strange breathlessness as if my heart had suddenly stopped beating. 'The army officer with a long moustache asked me to undress. I tried to resist, they undressed me and beat me up. But they didn't put needles inside my....' He didn't mention it. After a long pause he said, 'Perhaps they felt mine was too small for a needle.' We laughed together. I was amazed that in these times of torture, we could find something absurd to joke over.

It was 15 August. Bilal had been released a day before. After running from pillar to post seeking his son's release, Abdul Rahim Bhat finally managed to purchase a carpet from the bazaar and bribed the army officer. Bilal was asked to give a TV interview before he was released. In the evening, the day he was released, while he was lying down in his room and I was sitting right next to him, we watched his tutored interview on the

Indian government's TV channel, Doordarshan. The news anchor announced, 'Today on the eve of India's 44th Independence Day, authorities decided to release some of the arrested youth who were involved in recent terrorist activities in Kashmir.' I could see a battered Bilal Bhat in his sporty T-shirt giving his interview in Urdu. '*Army nay hamaray saath bohat acha salook kiya, hamara khayal rakha.* (The army treated us well and took good care of us.)' Bilal Bhat's lines were soon followed by a statement given by the moustached army officer: 'These young boys had deviated from the right path. We have given them a chance to get rehabilitated.' The anxious-looking Abdul Rahim, wearing a 'Khan suit' and a waistcoat announced to the world: '*Army yahan pay bohat acha kaam kar rahi hai.* (The army is doing an excellent job in Kashmir.)'



I am at Bilal's house. This time I am meeting him after 17 long years. Sitting next to me is my six-year-old nephew. I want to buy him a kite. I ask Bilal about the kite-maker. 'The kite-maker is no more. He died soon after they martyred his son in 1992. No one flies kites in Kadipora now. For, there's no kite-maker. We don't celebrate Navroze, our mountain is out of bounds for us, occupied by the Indian army. Tell me, in this land, where will you fly your kite?'

His question resonates in the room.

1 Hamid, Peerzada Arshad, 'Kashmir's Tortured past and Present, in Himal, September 2011 <<http://www.himalmag.com/component/content/article/1284-.html>> [accessed 17 March 2013].

Resistance

For us, azadi means not just getting rid of foreign occupation of our beloved motherland but also to remove hunger, poverty, ignorance and disease and to overcome economic and social deprivation. One day, we shall achieve that azadi.

– Maqbool Butt

The Matter of Truth, Lies and Manufacturing Consent in a Conflict Area



Gautam Navlakha

Wars revolving around the suppression of people by the military, as in Jammu and Kashmir, are intrinsically ‘dirty wars’. People are tyrannised so they give up demands such as: ‘Opt out of India’. Massacres, fake encounters, custodial killings, rape as a matter of policy, torture, and enforced disappearances are an inherent part of such wars.¹

In Kashmir, the death toll of over 70,000 acts as grim reminder of the scale of suppression. The non-acknowledgement of this is a story in itself: of how this *truth* is suppressed and manipulated so blame can be cast on the movement, and people’s perceptions can be manipulated. By suppressing truth not only are Kashmiris robbed of their right to articulate a lived experience, but they are also denied the hope that the truth will surface. In this essay I want to address these issues.

At a seminar held on 21 February 2012 by The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), Major General D Katoch opined: ‘Perception management is akin to advertising. Like in advertising, we need to get a message across to the target audience. But while getting the message across, we need to remember that the... actions of the army must be in sync with the perception management campaign.’

So what is perception management? It is to convey or repress select information to justify war or mislead those targeted. One of the classic cases of perception management is the CIA-funded plan by the Rendon Group, a leader in this space. The Rendon Group manipulated public opinion about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. In the case of Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian government has managed to project and sustain the view that the people’s rebellion is just a ‘proxy war’ launched by its neighbour Pakistan. The lie is propounded that Jammu and

Kashmir is an ‘integral’ part of India even when overwhelming evidence shows that the Indian state and society at large (barring a few honourable exceptions) have been cruelly indifferent to the violence inflicted on Kashmiris by the Indian military.² By and large, educated Indians look upon Jammu and Kashmir, and jealously guard it, as a trophy of war, a conquered Muslim majority territory won by India in a battle with Pakistan in 1947-48. In a twisted way this represents a triumph of perception management. What is important to note is that such manipulation has a far reaching impact, and the manipulators hope to influence the views of both Kashmiris as well as Indians. In other words deception, lies and half-truths that mould or manufacture public perception cannot be separated from low intensity warfare.

In its *Doctrine of Sub-Conventional Operations*, the Indian army asserts that the objective of counter-insurgency is this:

...the military operations should aim firstly, at *neutralizing all hostile elements* in the conflict zone that oppose or retard the peace initiatives and secondly, at *transforming the will and attitudes of the people*.... The endeavour should be *to bring about a realization* that fighting the government is a ‘no win’ situation and that their anti-government stance will only delay the return of peace and normalcy. Therefore, *distancing from the terrorists is in their own interest and the only plausible course of action*. However, the manifestation of such a realization can take from a couple of years to decades as attitudes take time to form and to change. (Emphasis mine.)³

The transformation of ‘the will and attitude’ of a people asks for brutal physical force and for the manipulation of their perceptions. Therefore, stone pelters and those released prior are summoned to local police stations every second day because ‘we (the police force) want to keep the pressure – we want them to know that we know who they are. The message from the top (government leaders) is clear. Last summer (the summer of 2010) shall not be repeated.’ Such micro managing tells its own story of how concerted attempts are made to manage and/or coerce people into silence.⁴

Internal wars also get prolonged. They throw up the need to limit and suppress news, opinions and expression. An essential feature of such perception management is controlling the flow of information, prohibiting debate and discussion on those issues that have to do with people’s views and hopes. The main idea is to gain an advantage in war by projecting observations that enhance the perspective of the authorities and controlling

how the target population views political issues. Misinformation spreads and the official version alone prevails.

Consequently, the message is sent to the local populace that they have no voice. The 'recalcitrant' inhabitants realise that they are at the mercy of the troops in more ways than one. They are compelled to give up their aspirations. They have to reconcile themselves to the idea of living in a forced union with India. But because people are resistant to such manoeuvring, security forces are also deployed, such that they can monitor the public and private lives of people.

Thought Control

The extent to which thought control is encouraged becomes apparent if one studies an incident from June 2011. The Jammu and Kashmir police charged London based Kashmiri broadcaster Nayeema Ahmad Mehjoor with 'inciting violence and spreading disinformation'. She was booked under Section 66 of the Information Technology Act. Her crime was to ask on Facebook: 'Why did police kill this man in Lal Chowk? Any reason? *Kya police aaram se nahin bethne degi logon ko?* (Will the police not let people even sit at home in peace?)'

This is only one of the tried and tested means of suppressing news and information. On 2 November 2011 handcuffed children were brought to a court in Srinagar, and detained under the dreaded preventive detention act in Kashmir, PSA.⁵ This was virtually blacked out by the local press. Just three weeks prior to this incident, on 10 October 2011, the Union Home Ministry announced: 'The (Home) Ministry has decided that newspapers with anti-national agenda will not be given any government support. If these newspapers change their attitude the ministry can reconsider its decision.' This elicited no criticism from the Indian mass media. Within merely a few weeks, newspapers in Jammu and Kashmir had 'fallen in line'. The 2 November 2011 incident was not reported, and no photographs were carried of the children in chains inside the courtroom.

The media 'falling in line' was inevitable if one considers certain hard facts. Neither the Editors Guild nor the Press Council of India (PCI), two alleged protectors of media freedom, have shown interest in Kashmir over the last 22 years. Through these turbulent decades, the supposed champions

of Indian media have remained by and large mute. The only time they intervened was in 1991 when the PCI sent a team headed by B G Verghese to exonerate the security forces accused of gang raping women in Kunan Poshpora. The supposed guardians of free expression worked in cahoots with the repressive Indian security establishment!

As a result, when a PCI team visited Srinagar after 21 years, they were questioned. They were asked why they had chosen to visit now, after two decades. And if, as they kept claiming, they believed in guarding media freedom in Jammu and Kashmir, they were told to withdraw their Kunan Poshpora report. To this, there was no response. This exchange found its way into just *one* newspaper, *Rising Kashmir*. The others chose to ignore it! Authorities made sure news did not travel far, and the narratives of local people were discredited. In other words, for decades Kashmir has been at the mercy of a regime that censors. Here, in this land, lies enjoy a premium and memories are short-circuited to make way for officially acceptable, widely circulated versions of the past.

Take the latest attempt at whitewashing the crimes of security forces. The Jammu and Kashmir Home Department claimed to have compiled lists of casualties between 1989 and 2011 and alleged that 43,746 persons had died. Of these 21,449 were militants, 16,901 were civilians and 5,396 were security force personnel. Of course, it says nothing about the tens of thousands tortured – 8,000 to 10,000 cases of enforced disappearances, or the discovery of mass/unidentified graves where locals and not foreigners are buried. Look at another statement closely. The police claimed that in the 38 graveyards of the three districts of North Kashmir most of the unidentified militants were ‘foreigners’; the number was pegged at 574. Both the IPTK and SHRC actually debunked this claim; they had solid evidence that the overwhelming majority of those buried in the three districts of North Kashmir (and investigated by the IPTK and SHRC) were local people! This shattered the claims of authorities that 6,000 ‘foreign’ militants had been killed and buried in Kashmir. The point is that the corrosive, brutal games of the Indian security forces are being suppressed. Only a sanitised version, in which rapes, massacres, torture and custodial killings are left out, is being put out.

This leads us to a chain of uncomfortable questions. If, as per official accounts, the number of militants in Kashmir is now less than 100, why is an Indian military force of 6,00,000 men still deployed in the region?⁶

Moreover, if even by official accounts, four times as many militants were killed than security forces, and an overwhelming majority of civilians died at the hands of security forces or their protégé, the renegades, why are all acts resulting in death referred to as ‘militancy related violence’? Should the deaths not be referred to as ‘casualties due to military suppression’? The difference is immense because the prefix ‘militancy’ is a loaded term, conveying unlawful insubordination. How one describes reality is of consequence.

But it is one thing to censor the media and another to force people to censor their thoughts. The latter plays an important role in perception management. A significant element of this is placing curbs on academic freedom of expression or prohibiting dissent. There are two ways of doing this. Under draconian laws such as Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, freedom of expression, assembly and association can be proscribed by banning an organisation. Proscription of an organisation criminalises a political ideology. And membership, sympathy and support all become criminal acts. The ambiguity regarding what constitutes terror crimes, and the enforcement of the law primarily against religious or linguistic minorities or those espousing causes which threaten status-quo, shows that it is not a particular type of heinous behaviour which is being outlawed, but an ideology or a group espousing that stance.

Thus in J&K any organisation which speaks in favour of the right to self-determination or argues against a forced union with India gets proscribed. Why? Because in India the law mandates that even the democratic and peaceful articulation of freedom *from* India is a heinous crime. So much so that an anti-democratic line of questioning cannot be fostered by college and university authorities in Kashmir. (This is unlike Jammu, where right wing Hindutva forces have a free run.) For instance, Kashmir University not only had to ban a student union in 2009 because students protested against the rape and murder of two women in Shopian, but also had to outlaw debates and discussions on such issues. Among the topics that could not be discussed were the ongoing war of suppression in Kashmir, the quest for azadi, Jammu and Kashmir’s forced union with India, the colonial nature of the relationship, the enforced economic dependence – all relevant and legitimate subjects of concern. The authorities defended such freedoms for Jammu University by claiming that Jammu only had pro-India parties whereas Kashmir has separatists! In other

words, Hindu majoritarian parties and expression have a free-run in Jammu campuses whereas anyone who speaks of azadi in Kashmir becomes a criminal. Thus freedom to preach hatred enjoys a premium over the articulation of freedom from oppression. Why? Because hate is ‘patriotic’ and freedom from oppression is ‘anti-national’. Underpinning this is perhaps the fear that young inquiring minds will pose uncomfortable questions or probe and discover facts that will dislodge the ‘perception management’ being carried out by the security forces. With the police, central paramilitary forces and the army engaging in ‘counselling’ the youth, so they abandon ‘wrong ideas’, suppression of academic freedom becomes absolutely necessary.

For 64 years educational institutions have discouraged intellectual freedom and forced people to toe the official line and accept received wisdom. Kashmir is living under a totalitarian regime that refuses to equip people with intellectual skills, for fear that they will become masters of their own destiny.

The More Things Change, The More They Remain the Same

As with everything else, change comes with a caveat. Because there is greater control being exercised over news by the authorities, some leaders of the movement are encouraged and others are shunned or incarcerated. Many activists are outlawed and vilified. Perhaps the only hope is the indomitable spirit of ordinary people. The movement has managed to carve out an autonomous space for itself, which had earlier been suppressed, through social media. Of course, even on social networking sites, the presence of the Indian state is evident, and it tries to threaten, cajole and sweet talk people into falling in line. But it cannot be denied that today there is greater know-how displayed by those helming the movement in Kashmir.

Just when the movement needs the local media to be responsive professionally and politically, the owners have buckled under or show signs of buckling under the diktat of Indian authorities. Consequently, the political sensibility of Kashmiris is rarely, if ever, captured by the media or

commentators. We have caught brief glimpses into the views of the local populace during the summer of 2010, when the NDTV news channel invited a few Kashmiri youth to their studios. After that however there has been grave silence.

But the paradox is that because the movement is alive despite being shunned by the media, it is forced to rely on its own wits and imagination to carry on a vibrant discourse. It is the interplay between these two divergent trends that is the hallmark of the movement today. It is the outcome of this interaction that will decide the nature of closure or chart a solution.

In the meantime, azadi and the very idea of azadi – which in Kashmir at its core means an opposition to a forced union with India – is being demonised or trivialised. By shrouding the term azadi in layers of confused talk, it is assumed that a solution will be stumbled upon within the bounds of the Indian Constitution. People consequently are robbed of their role as makers of their own fate and are viewed as subjects to be mollified with ‘concessions’. The confusion gets compounded when politicians use azadi as a tool for negotiation to get concessions from New Delhi. Thus azadi gets translated into nothing more than freedom from AFSPA, everyday inconvenience and unemployment... all this and presumably little more. In substance nothing changes. At such times, the vibrant debate online, not the stage-managed show choreographed by the Indian state, assumes even more significance.

This compels me to draw the reader’s attention to something the Indian prime minister said at the fifth convocation of Sher-I-Kashmir University for Agriculture, Science and Technology on 9 June 2010. ‘There are,’ he said, ‘a handful of people who do not want any political process for empowering people to succeed. This is the reason that attempts to disturb the lives of people in the Valley still continue from across the LoC... Our security agencies are forced to act in the wake of such incidents. During the process sometimes innocent civilians have to suffer....’ Two days later, a spate of killings began in Kashmir.

The full import of what the Indian prime minister said has to be considered. Militancy is said to be on the decline. Yet there is huge police and military presence in Kashmir. The DG of police tries justifying this by claiming that the ‘presence of forces in different areas is not proportional to the number of militants.... Now any change in deployment pattern has to be viewed in context of potential of militancy to strike in any area...’⁷ So it is

no longer real threat but *potential* threat that is being fought! Behind such semantic jugglery is a manifest effort to try and justify the continued massive deployment of military forces. As a result, the goalpost for demilitarisation (which includes large-scale troop cutback) keeps shifting.

The Indian army chief said that infiltration had come down in 2010 compared to 2009 from 110 persons to 85.⁸ This is of course way below the estimate of several thousand infiltrating in 2001. How can 85 persons infiltrating pose such a threat to a mighty Indian state? The Indian army chief who had said that infiltration had come down, had just four days prior to that said something very different while objecting to a demand for troop withdrawal. 'In 2010 there were 468 infiltration bids of which 95 were successful and 40 terrorists were killed.' Then went on to say: 'The areas they cleared should not become terrorist infested again.'⁹ So it does not matter if armed militancy has declined because now the same forces within the army will continue to call the shots to ensure that militants do not return! All those who claimed that with a decline in militancy the Indian government could be persuaded to roll back the repressive regime are compelled to remain silent. Clearly, official 'truth' is a very elastic thing. And keeping pace with the official line can be very damaging to the reputation of most pacifist or non-violent people.

This brings to me another aspect of this discussion. Wikileaks disclosed that the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) had briefed US diplomats about the 'rampant use of torture' in Jammu and Kashmir, the Northeast and elsewhere. The scale and extent of torture used in J&K – where the number of victims varies between 60,000 to several hundred thousand – is huge, if torture is understood in accordance with the international Convention Against Torture. Why the ICRC chose to brief US officials, given their neutrality, deserves analysis. But for now let us consider the import of what they said.

The ICRC was allowed into Kashmir under a 'limited mandate' in 1995 and could visit prisoners in designated centres and jails, but was barred from interrogation centres such as the notorious Cargo Building (Humhama) near the Srinagar airport. While the ICRC shared data for the years 2002-2004 with US diplomats – which shows that 45% of 1,491 detainees/prisoners interviewed by them in 177 visits were tortured – they pointed out that conditions, in contrast to the 1990s, had improved.

Now let us consider the facts before us. In the five months of 2010, eight children died due to torture, and of the 3,000 detained, a very large number were juvenile.¹⁰ Cases of the sexual abuse of boys too have surfaced from time to time, the most recent being from 2009. On 29 October 2009, when 11 boys were produced before the session's court, some of them narrated how they were forced to commit sodomy and how their photographs had been taken by their torturers. The boys were threatened that the photos would be leaked if they did not quit the movement. The court ordered a medical examination, and doctors in their report confirmed that there were bruises on the victims' buttocks.¹¹ But no action was taken against the perpetrators of the crime.

Now, despite such damning evidence, the truth about widespread torture remained suppressed. Not one Indian newspaper or electronic channel raised this issue or had anything to say. This loyalty to the suppression of truth means that the Indian public is no wiser about the crimes against humanity carried out in their name by the Indian security forces.

This brings me to the final point. The Indian prime minister during the course of a press interaction in Jammu on 4 March 2011 said that if arbitrary arrests 'were taking place in the Valley, (they) were not consistent with the norms of civilised governments.' A fair-minded person would say that the Indian PM was being parsimonious with facts. Arbitrary arrests have been in operation in Kashmir for over 63 years, just as 'catch and kill' or 'shoot to kill' are intrinsic to the narratives of the last 21 years.¹² Neither could have taken place without the concurrence of, if not at the behest of, New Delhi. In 2009, it was the Indian prime minister who asked the security forces to check and contain agitations because they were being used by 'separatists' to foment disturbance. The army's senior-most general of the Northern Command dubbed it as 'agitation terrorism' and a killing spree followed thereafter.

The point is that the Indian state claims that it is defending 'territorial integrity' when it targets Muslims of J&K, but swiftly professes that it is appeasing 'nationalist forces' when it soft pedals a BJP-Congress led agitation in the Hindu majority districts of Jammu. Lest we forget, the only criterion guiding ex-governor Lt General S K Sinha's classification of the agitation in Jammu as 'nationalist' and the one in the Valley as 'anti-

national’ was this: In Jammu ‘agitators have been carrying (a) national flag’ whereas in Kashmir ‘they have been carrying Pakistani flags’.¹³ The national security advisor recently claimed that security forces could not accept the Indian flag being abused by non-violent agitators. But apparently there was nothing wrong with Jammu rioters committing heinous crimes while holding the Indian flag. Or with flag loving security forces firing on unarmed people. The dishonour brought to the flag by such deeds does not seem to matter. Thus a street goon in a Hindu territory is entirely free to commit a crime after wrapping himself in a tricolour. Quite evidently, the rot runs deep through the corridors of power.

With these facts before us, we are forced to ask some pertinent questions. Who is at the receiving end of the state’s crackdown and who are recipients of its benevolence? Who is patronised and who is persecuted? Who is assailed by bullets and who is bailed out? Who is detained and who is compensated? Who is chased and beaten and who roams free? Which truth is suppressed and which lie gets paraded as fact? Who are the perpetrators of crime and who are the aggrieved?

Changed Reality

Nevertheless, the change in reality brought about by insurgency and counter-insurgency is seldom given its due. The mass struggle of 2008-2010 was, if anything, a celebration of a new-found defiance when confronted with oppression, and of novel ways of expression and articulation coming to fore. It was an acknowledgement of a shift from armed to mass struggle. People were willing to fight bullets with stones, which takes courage. Just as taking up guns to fight a massive predatory force becomes a noble act. The idea of azadi was not given up when armed struggle was replaced with mass struggle. Rather, it emerged as the collective assertion of the people. The relationship between leaders and those led, between parties and people got transformed. Remarkably, the incidence of trauma and stress that afflicted people earlier showed a decline. Self-confidence and self-worth grew.

Now as a result, both pro-Indian and pro-azadi political formations know that they enjoy a narrow mandate and that a compromise on the fundamental problem – the unresolved nature of the Kashmir dispute – will

not be accepted. So great has been the impact of the 2008-10 agitations that the pro-India National Conference and PDP publicly state that elections (parliament, assembly or for local bodies) have nothing to do with the resolution of the disputed nature of Kashmir's accession. They keep repeating that development work being carried out is not a substitute for nor can it replace the longstanding dispute and the need for its solution. Omar Abdullah is in fact most emphatic about de-linking elections from the resolution of the 'outstanding' issue.

Sure, pro-India parties are being hypocritical, but as far as hypocrisy amounts to vice paying obeisance to virtue. The stances of the political parties are a covert admission of the popular mood in the Valley which remains firmly disenchanted with machinations and manipulations of the Indian government, with its insistence on a solution that is in keeping with the Indian Constitution, and its ability to grant only a degraded form of autonomy.¹⁴

Just as best laid plans can come to naught, what perception management is paradoxically achieving is this: It is convincing Kashmiris that there is little likelihood of a democratic solution within India which will guarantee them the life of dignity and freedom they hope for. They are beginning to learn that the prime minister becomes ineffectual when confronted with facts. The state can try managing perceptions, but the truth will remain a powerful weapon that undermines these efforts.

1 Waheed, Mirza, 'India's Bloodstained Democracy', *The New York Times*, 6 July 2012 <www.nytimes.com/2012/07/08/opinion/sunday/indias-blood-stained-democracy.html?_r=0> [accessed 17 March 2013].

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Summer in the Valley



Caelainn Hogan

The night Iftikhar drove across town at the height of curfew just to bring a fresh chicken, it felt like a celebration. The markets had been closed for days and there had been nothing but potatoes and peas to eat. He didn't stay to chat, or take the short *shikara* ride across the lake to the houseboat, drink tea with Husam and give his regards to the family. He parked on the boulevard at the edge of the lake and proudly handed me the chicken, wrapped in newspaper, from the car window. Then he started his journey back across town with its vacant streets and locked shutters. I wished him luck avoiding the barricades.

That was the 3 July 2010. Less than a month before, the same boulevard at night was a carnival of makeshift souvenir stalls, punctuated by floating bouquets of candyfloss, balloons and light up toys carried by eager salesmen. The illuminated entrances of houseboats splashed neon light onto the water and tourists crowded the shores of Dal Lake.

In the daytime the road was loud with traffic, horns and radio music blaring. The lake was a postcard image: ornate houseboats with their kitsch painted signs ('Hollywood', 'Miss America', 'Kismet') and the vivid colours of the gondola-like shikaras. The water mirrored a circle of mountain peaks and when there was a mist, seemed to merge with the sky above. Hawks swooped and glided overhead, and the electric blue flash of kingfishers caught your eye amongst floating fields of lilies.

When I first arrived, the lake was a relief after the tense road from the Srinagar airport, lined with military trucks and soldiers. I had come to live with Husam and his family on their houseboat for a month or so, while teaching at a nearby school. The words 'azadi' and '*hartal*' were foreign to me.

I arrived in Srinagar on 11 June, the day Tufail Matoo was killed. The first evening, while I was preparing lesson plans for the next day, I got a call to say a young schoolboy had been killed downtown. The next day there would be a hartal, a strike throughout the city. The school would be closed. The 17-year-old had been returning home from class when he had been hit by a tear gas canister fired by security forces. His death marked the start of a cycle of protests, strikes and military enforced curfew which would leave the Valley under almost continual shutdown. Over 100 people would be killed during the summer's unrest, many of them only teenagers like Tufail.

I remember on a warm afternoon, three generations of Indian women sitting on the deck of the houseboat, two dressed in traditional saris, the younger one in jeans but still wearing the traditional red *bindi*. They turned to Husam's son and asked: 'How far is Kashmir from Srinagar?'

Srinagar was a city on a map, the airport they flew into. Kashmir seemed to represent an intangible ideal, a word simultaneously analogous with conflict and paradise, a land claimed and contested, coveted as the 'crown of India' and one of the most militarised regions in the world.

Kashmiris always talked of 'tension'. As an outsider, the tension and disparity between the Kashmir of the tourist and the everyday reality of Kashmiris was obvious. The idea of any state of 'normalcy' in the face of such heavy military presence seemed laughable. 6,00,000 soldiers were posted in Kashmir. In the bustling streets of Lal Chowk, paramilitary police carrying AK-47s would patrol alongside busy shoppers. The streets in Srinagar, especially downtown, were punctuated by military bunkers swathed in razor wire. Even along the lazy countryside of Pampore, at the bottom of the lanes that wound through fields of saffron, you were met with army camps, their fences strung with empty beer bottles.

This was the same Kashmir that *Lonely Planet* had recently awarded the coveted title of 'Best Emerging Destination India' in 2012, with two million tourists expected to flock to the Valley, enticed back after two years of relative 'normalcy'. Yet even at the height of unrest in 2010, tourists came to enjoy the pristine lawns of the Mughal Gardens which overlooked the lake or take tours in colourful shikara boats. The ski resort of Gulmarg, even then, was considered one of the best in Asia, and Hindu pilgrimages such as the Armanath Yatra in Pahalgam draw hundreds, sometimes thousands, every summer.

Between the two extremes of tourism and conflict were everyday Kashmiris struggling to live normal lives. Even during a summer of strikes and curfews, I saw families celebrating their baby son's first haircut at the shrine below Hari Parbat. A young schoolgirl at the shrine told me she was praying to do well in her exams. With the schools closed most of the summer, she probably never got the chance to test her faith.

On 28 June, I shared a jeep with an Indian family on a daytrip to Sonamarg. Many tourists come to the alpine meadows to see snow for the first time. Nicknamed the 'Switzerland of the East', it was the stage for many classic Bollywood movies. On the road back to Srinagar, pop music blasting from the car radio, we passed the sleepy, green paddy fields of the Ganderbal district. That day, in Varmul, nine-year-old Tauqeer Ahmed Rather was killed by a bullet to the chest when CRPF men opened fire on a procession.

Two days later all oil and fuel supplies to the Valley were stopped. Local people spoke of the 2008 unrest when the road to Jammu, the main thoroughfare for fuel and commodities, was shut down. Many saw it as an attempt to stifle the protests. Drivers flocked to the one petrol station on the highway still operating. I was in a car with friends driving past Batmaloo while a clash between CRPF and stone pelters was erupting. The driver slowed the car to get a better look at what was going on but a man reprimanded us: 'You come to watch while people are dying on the other side.'

In Natipora the narrow, quiet streets were littered with stones thrown by protesters in the morning. Rudimentary barricades made from rocks and sheets of metal had been erected. Neighbours said that earlier houses had been ransacked by frustrated security forces unable to catch the stone pelters. The streets lay in quiet tension under an uneasy ceasefire sure to erupt again. The silence was broken suddenly by a truck full of young boys, some no more than 5- or 6-years-old, speeding past. Their arms punched the air as together they shouted 'azadi' over and over.

At the edge of a crop field, a group of young boys were playing cricket in the last hours of light. Under the shade of a nearby tree, members of the paramilitary CRPF stood by, holding metal-tipped canes.

The city had become both playground and battlefield.



That summer Kashmir was 'on the boil'. A civilian driven protest movement tried bringing men, women and children from all backgrounds into the streets. The Valley witnessed some of the most vehement and widespread unrest in decades.

The Indian army was deployed in July to subdue the unrest and by August was enforcing shoot-on-sight curfews. Pro-independence protests became larger and more frequent, motivated by continuing civilian fatalities. The security forces in turn imposed curfew and when demonstrations escalated, used tear gas, rubber bullets and sometimes live rounds.

At night on the lake, the family and I would sit on the floor watching the footage on local news of protests in downtown Srinagar, or in places like Islamabad, Varmul or Sopore. It seemed a world away. When the number of civilian fatalities began to rise and the curfew became more severe, it seemed surreal that there was little mention of the unfolding situation in the wider world media.

Stone pelting, a common highlight after otherwise peaceful demonstrations, became an outlet of frustration and a statement against the heavily armed police and paramilitary forces. Suddenly it was not just young men rousing trouble, but old women, businessmen and children picking up stones to throw. When stones were answered by bullets, more people took to the streets. Protests ranged from the usual strikes or marches called by the Hurriyat and other separatist leaders, to impromptu sit down demonstrations in local neighbourhoods.

The media became obsessed with stone throwers, with news reports dedicated to understanding what motivated them, although to those in Kashmir it seemed obvious. During the 80s and 90s Pakistan was accused of arming militants, but that summer in Kashmir the running joke was: 'Are they now providing the stones?'

A local student named Faysal described to me the frustration felt by many young Kashmiris. 'We are beaten with batons, bombed with tear gas canisters and ultimately showered with bullets,' he said. 'We take stones in retaliation and then the Indian media portrays us as mobsters and gunless terrorists.'

Almost every person I met had a story about the torture methods used on suspected insurgents during the height of the conflict in the 80s and 90s. Too many had personal testimonies. I heard accounts of logs rolled over

legs until they broke, backs thrashed with hot iron rods. One man who had been brought to the interrogation centre described how he was sat down in a chair and politely served a cup of tea, while in front of him a man was hung by his wrists and his legs, stretched so extremely his joints began to dislocate. He said sitting in that chair was worse than any physical torture.



On the afternoon of 6 July, Muzaffar Ahmed Bhat's family sat in a room of their house in the seemingly peaceful village of Gangbug on the outskirts of Srinagar and waited for their 17-year-old son's body to be returned by the police. He had not come back the night before after an evening walk, and witnesses claimed he had been brutally beaten by members of the CRPF.

I was led through the crowd of neighbours waiting in anxious silence in the garden and into the house to meet with Muzaffar's family. I remember repeatedly attempting to remove my shoes as I was ushered inside, a routine custom when entering any Kashmiri home. The women leading me kept putting my shoes back on, as if to say such rituals were not necessary here any more, there was nothing sacred left. This was a home laid bare.

In the living room, the family sat huddled together on the carpeted floor. The mother, with her arms outstretched, sang funeral songs through her sobs, even as her husband who squatted beside her held his face in his hands. Their daughter rocked back and forth in the arms of a neighbour, tears streaming down her face. A small passport sized photo of Muzaffar in his school uniform was passed around.

Upon the arrival of the coffin, the mourners crowded around and as the face of Muzaffar was unveiled, the crowd contracted in grief. The plywood coffin was lifted upon shoulders and carried in a procession down the small village roads and across a wooden bridge to a football field where Muzaffar had often played. His coffin was soon joined by that of Fayaz Ahmed Wani, a 35-year-old government employee and father of two daughters, who lived two minutes away from Muzaffar, and had been allegedly shot in the head during police firing.

The two coffins were laid on the ground together, surrounded by a crowd of hundreds of outraged mourners who had gathered despite curfew. The shrouds covering the faces of the men were uncovered and journalists were ushered through the pressing crowd to photograph the wounds. The

crude stitches that held the flesh of Muzaffar's forehead together were still wet with blood. Weeks later, it would be reported by authorities that the boy's death had resulted from drowning.

Hundreds of women, who would usually only be present at the final funeral ceremony, crowded the hill that stretched above the men, on the way chanting: 'Stay with them'. Their presence was intended as protection from security forces who could potentially attempt to disperse the crowd. Later in the day, the funeral procession carrying the coffins to Eidgah, the martyrs' graveyard, would be stopped by the police and driven back. Photos would appear in newspapers of Muzaffar's father trying to shield his son's coffin which had been dropped to the ground as the crowd got violently disbanded.

As we made our way back through the city, men, women and children had gathered to hold sit down protests in their neighbourhoods and even on the main airport road. In Natipora, men and boys marched down the streets of their neighbourhoods in dissent. Women joined them, from young girls chanting slogans to old ladies in faded pherans raising their fists.

The next day, on 7 July, the Indian army was deployed to Kashmir. A procession of camouflaged trucks and armoured jeeps drove through the deserted, shuttered streets. Journalists were forced to remain inside their offices, their curfew passes revoked. They watched from the windows of Hotel Jehangir as the army 'flag marched' through the streets below.

On Dal Lake policemen patrolled the shikaras which usually carried lounging tourists on scenic tours. No one was permitted to come ashore after protests had erupted on the lake the night before. The normally bustling boulevard was deserted. Only jeeps heading to the Amarnath Yatra sped past. The armoured police jeeps commonly referred to as 'bunkers' slowly patrolled the lanes.



July is the start of wedding season, and though the local television channels announced countless cancellations, daily life as well as wedding celebrations did continue despite curfew. Iftikhar and his family brought me to the wedding celebrations of two relations in a quiet suburb of Srinagar. Inside the house draped in celebration lights, women sat together singing traditional wedding songs, rocking gently while they played *tumbakhnari* drums or struck out rhythms on copper pots with a handful of car keys. One

led the song and the others answered. These were mournful songs, old tales, mingling with the intermittent sobs of a child having lost his mother in the crowd of women. In the airy, light dappled room of the groom's house, mothers and daughters sang for two young men about to be married.

The family and I drove back from the wedding at 5 am, in case curfew later in the morning made the journey through downtown impossible. We passed the Jamia Masjid in the sleepy dawn light. On the walls of the largest, most majestic mosque in Kashmir was written a simple demand: 'Go India Go Back'.¹

On 17 July shops were allowed open for the first time in 21 days, although only until 2 pm. The roads and streets around Lal Chowk were choked with traffic, impatient horns beeping as pedestrians weaved between the busy sidewalks. An enthusiastic mayhem overtook the streets as people rushed to the central shopping areas to buy goods and enjoy a few precious hours of normalcy.

The streets around Eidgah were quiet; the calm space of the largest martyrs' graveyard in Srinagar was undisturbed by visitors. Over 1,000 were buried on those grounds. The mound of earth above the grave of Tufail still looked freshly set, and the headstones of those most recently buried were adorned with wreaths and ornaments. Towards the back of the graveyard lay a tellingly large section of green land. That evening a friend called to say a boy from class seven had died at the hands of security forces in Sopore.

I left Srinagar, still under heavy curfew, in late July. Before flying home from Delhi I spent a day with a Kashmiri friend working in the capital. He told me of a phone call he had had earlier that day with his nine-year-old son. The boy had asked him, 'Is there curfew in Delhi, Daddy?' His father had told him, 'No, there is no curfew here.' 'Then why can't you bring me there?' the son had asked. His father had told him it was too hot in Delhi, he wouldn't like it. 'Is Delhi burning too?' the son asked. Everyone spoke of Kashmir as being on the boil. His father had told him no, it wasn't burning like that. His son replied: 'So take me there.'

¹ Haq, Muhabit-ul, 'Graffiti: The Art of Resistance', in The Kashmir Walla, 7 October 2011 <<http://www.thekashmirwalla.com/2011/10/graffitti-the-art-of-resistance>> [accessed 17 March 2013].

Non-Violent Phases of Kashmir's Resistance Post-1947



Dr Sheikh Showkat Hussain

Majeed Beigh has been our milkman since my childhood. We used to call him 'Doodhu Uncle'. My mother would always insist that he be paid immediately at the end of every month, saying that the man has suffered a lot since childhood. 'His father was a pious bearded man. Soon after the Indian army landed in Kashmir they perceived every bearded person as a tribesman, who had come from the Frontier Province to fight the army of the maharaja. They indiscriminately killed many bearded persons and Majeed Beigh's father was one of them. The killings triggered a lot of public resentment and people from our area took a procession of the dead bodies, and thus started the resistance. Kashmiris realised that the Indian army had not come to support, but to subjugate.'

When I grew up, it was through history books that I came to know that my mother's narrative had been a major event. The episode had occurred on the bridge across the flood channel and had triggered the first ever procession in Kashmir after the arrival of the Indian army. It sparked suspicion even in the minds of those who had been instrumental in persuading the maharaja to call the Indian army.

Kashmiris continue to dispute the legitimacy of the manner of Kashmir's accession. They perceive it to be a bond of subjugation and resist Indian rule over the state. The reason for this perception is that the state was annexed to India in unusual circumstances and the viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, subjected its finality to an endorsement by the people of the state. Pandit Nehru too made it clear that the fate of the state would be determined by its people through an internationally supervised plebiscite. The resistance started soon after Indian troops landed in the state. The

modes of resistance assumed different forms with changing times and on most occasions it remained non-violent.

From 1949 to 1953, the Political Conference of Ghulam Mohi-ud-din Karra remained in the forefront of this struggle. Mohi-ud-din Karra was previously a National Conference activist and remained a star campaigner of its Quit Kashmir agitation of 1946. He was against the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to the Indian Union and launched the Jammu and Kashmir Political Conference (JKPC) to agitate against it. The resistance at this juncture remained confined to pasting posters and raising slogans after Friday prayers whenever and wherever possible. Dissent was mostly articulated by worshipers at Jamia Masjid and students of the Sri Pratap College (better known as SP College).

Even these modes of resistance invoked harsh reactions from the local administration, led by Sheikh Abdullah. During a time when listening to Radio Pakistan could invoke terror of *Khoftan Fakirs* (renegades of those times) indulging in pasting posters was fraught with horrifying repercussions. These included various forms of torture and banishment to Azad Kashmir. Hundreds of activists were subjected to these forms of punishment. The posters and slogans, however, played a role in mobilising people. The mobilisation manifested itself in the form of sloganeering at SP College on the eve of the UN Commission's visit and a similar scenario unfolded on a larger scale at Eidgah during Moulana Abul Kalam Azad's address to people on the occasion of Eid in 1953. On account of Karra's previous proximity to Abdullah, New Delhi perceived these incidents to be a result of Sheikh Abdullah's overt instigation and administrative mis-governance. Sheikh Abdullah was dismissed from prime ministership and detained for a period of 11 years. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad was installed as prime minister of the state.

For a while, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad managed to clamp down the resistance through his cultural carnivals and his *googa* terror (Kashmiri distortion for the Urdu word *gurga*, meaning a type of hoodlum). During those years, every evening we used to hear cries of '*khabardaar*' from these googas, who would enter a house on the mere suspicion that the people who lived there listened to the Azad Kashmir radio station and would kidnap the inmates and subject them to torture. The modes of torture would include pressing hot iron rods over the bellies of the detained and stuffing warm boiled potatoes into their mouths.

The situation, however, instead of improving, deteriorated further with Mirza Afzal Beigh organising a resistance movement through the Plebiscite Front (1955-1975). The state remained ruthless in suppressing the front and presumed that the development packages and land reforms showered upon the people of the state worked. All this, however, proved to be an illusion and Kashmir erupted as soon as the news about the sacrilege of the Hazratbal Shrine spread in the early 60s.

Election boycott, non-cooperation, and jail *bharo* became ways of defiance at this juncture. The peaceful resistance reached its climax in 1963 during the Moi-e-Muqaddas Agitation. All myths of peace and illusions about Kashmiris reconciling to a status quo exploded, to the extent that even Nehru felt that the relationship between Jammu and Kashmir and India was dependent upon a bond that was as fragile as an unspun thread.

For a while Nehru grew nervous, released Sheikh Abdullah and facilitated his visit to Pakistan to sort out the festering issues. Nehru died while Sheikh Abdullah was in Islamabad negotiating with Field Marshal Ayub Khan. Instead of responding to the popular resistance movement, Nehru's successors in Delhi tried to suppress the people's movement through economic packages, and legal and administrative measures aimed at the integration of the state.

Finding itself in a comfortable position because of support from the West after the Chinese invasion of 1962, the Indian state began depriving Jammu and Kashmir of whatever autonomy it enjoyed. The posts of prime minister and *sadr-e-riyasat* were replaced by designations such as chief minister and governor. Indian political parties were allowed to create local units. In reaction to these attempts at assimilation, Kashmir plunged into insurgency in 1965, leading to the eruption of the Indo-Pak War.

The Indian army's counter-insurgency operations proved to be a bitter experience for Kashmiris. We saw villages burning, civilians being targeted, bombardments, youth being detained, and torture centres sprouting everywhere. Engineering and medical college students were the prime targets of security agencies. Some of the medicos and engineering students in our locality also experienced detention and torture. As school-going boys we saw their families running from pillar-to-post to find out about their whereabouts.

One of the detention centres was on my way to school in the Amira Kadal area. Family members would sit in shops opposite the interrogation

centre and try communicating with the inmates through signs, asking if their kith and kin were lodged there. For months, one of the families from my locality thought that their son was lodged in the centre near my school; they were convinced that he had tried to convey it to them through the window panes. When he was released after a year, he said that he had never been lodged in that facility, but had been detained in a different centre near Baghi Mehtab.

The Indo-Pak stand-off induced Americans to impose an embargo on the supply of military hardware to the sub-continent. It worked to India's advantage as it hardly used American arms, while Pakistan exclusively relied upon American military hardware. The continuation of the embargo made Pakistan vulnerable and resulted in its dismemberment in 1971.

The events leading to Pakistan's division had a deep impact upon the Kashmiri psyche. The Kashmir resistance opted for a 'Look-East Policy' and tried to emulate the strategy adopted by Sheikh Mujeeb-ur-Rahman's Awami League for secession from Pakistan. The strategy involved participating in elections and using the electoral mandate as a justification for secession.

Plebiscite Front, the main pro-freedom group at that time in Kashmir, decided to contest elections. Other resistance groups decided to follow the same strategy. The Indian state, scared of this mode of resistance, imposed a ban on the Plebiscite Front and did not allow it to join the electoral fray. Sheikh Abdullah could participate in the elections only after he deserted the Plebiscite Front and transformed it into the National Conference. Other parties, such as Jama'at-e-Islami and Awami Action Committee (AAC) were perceived as being much too insignificant, and were allowed to join the electoral fray directly or indirectly.

Using elections for mobilisation continued to be a policy with groups such as the AAC until 1987. Kashmiri society as a whole, and especially the younger generation, participated in these elections with the conviction that the mandate would be used as a justification for secession. Syed Salah-ud-Din and Syed Ali Shah Geelani were some of the resistance leaders who participated in the polls. The Indian state made it a point to manipulate the elections and this is what triggered the militant phase of resistance.

Though some Kashmiri youth always believed that peaceful resistance would not yield results and that armed insurgency was the only viable option, this thought process remained popular only with the Punjabi-

speaking Muslims of Poonch and Rajouri. They remained in the forefront of the insurgencies in 1947 and 1965. The people of the Kashmir Valley veered towards this viewpoint only after 1971.

Al-Fatah was the first indigenous group that tried to recruit youth on a large scale. The Indian state managed to foil Al-Fatah's attempts before it could embark on any major operation. Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) led by Maqbool Butt remained a Muzaffarabad-centric effort without a considerable support base in the Valley. Two attempts of the front to launch operations in the Valley turned out to be fiascos, leading to Maqbool Butt being detained in 1966 and in the early 80s. In 1967 he managed to sneak out of jail, but in the 80s he was lodged in Tihar jail from where he could not escape. The death of an Indian diplomat in London at the hands of JKLF activists provoked the Indian state into executing him. His death received a mute response, but contributed to the transformation of Kashmiri youth from non-violent agitators to armed rebels.

Disillusioned with the electoral process' capacity to fulfil their aspirations, young men resorted to aggression. The Afghan jihad and Punjab insurgency provided further impetus to the armed resistance. The defeat and dismemberment of the Soviet Union as a result of the Afghan Mujahedeen emboldened Kashmiri youth and militant resistance became a predominant way of fighting for azadi. The Indian state responded with promises of negotiated settlement, while at the same time used ruthless force to suppress insurgency. Narsimha Rao, the then prime minister of India, went to the extent of offering self-rule with the 'sky as its limit'. Mauled and mutilated by the continued resistance, the Indian state offered a ceasefire to the Hizbul Mujahedeen. The pressure of resistance humbled the central government to the extent that it sent its foreign minister, Jaswant Singh, along with Masood Azhar to Kandahar in 2001.

The Indian state also proceeded with its negotiations with Pakistan. At this point, India had lost its edge of superiority in conventional warfare on account of its nuclear programme. While keeping Pakistan and Kashmiris engaged in conversation, the Indian state unleashed a reign of terror and tyranny through a group of mercenaries, in the name of counter-insurgency operations. The group resorted to killing thousands of civilians, especially those who belonged to Jama'at-e-Islami and they started extortions and the smuggling of timber from Kashmir forests. For a while this strategy led to the harassment of resisting groups. The pro-freedom militants, however,

soon overpowered the mercenaries; the prominent members of this group of mercenaries, Kuka Parrey and Javeed Shah, were eliminated.

Pro-resistance political and militant groups again regained their dominant position in the state. Most of the elections conducted between 1995 and 2001 were boycotted by people. The whole electoral process as a result began to lack credibility. Despite installing a civilian government, the Indian state failed to subdue the resistance.

During these times of turbulence, the events of 9/11, which devastated the World Trade Center Towers, transformed all the equations in favour of India. USA mobilised the world against multiple armed freedom movements and dubbed these as manifestations of terrorism. The tirade against so-called 'terrorism' was so ruthless that the mastermind of the Kargil conflict, General Pervez Musharraf lost his nerve. Pakistan appeared to take a U-turn in its Kashmir policy. These postures unnerved a segment of the local leadership, which too began to see merit in reconciliation, in an adherence to status quo in the name of realism.

The Indian state perceived the war on terror as a permanent phenomenon. Instead of taking advantage and settling the Kashmir issue, it engaged in hoodwinking the Kashmiris, while engaging in the rhetoric of 'do more' with Pakistan. The situation, to India's dismay, proved to be temporary. The American war on terror was a big fiasco for the superpower. On the one hand, the US continued to receive body-bags from Afghanistan, and on the other hand, its economy plunged into recession.

It was at this juncture that Kashmiri masses started adopting a different mode of resistance. The Look-East Policy of the pre-1990s was substituted by a policy of looking towards the Middle East. The Palestinian Intifada became a role model for Kashmiri youth. The young and the resilient segment of the leadership started to use demonstrations and the ensuing clashes precipitated into stone throwing as a fresh form of dissent. There was nothing new in the modus operandi; the only new element was the conscious involvement of youngsters.

The 2008 Amarnath land row catalysed mass mobilisation in favour of this manner of resistance. It dissipated all illusions about Kashmiris having reconciled to the status quo on account of lower levels of militancy. Kashmiri youth continued with this pattern of dissent even after the Amarnath land row. The protests, however, remained confined to towns and cities, and leaders opted to take a lukewarm approach towards them. Some

self-styled intellectuals and Muftis even ridiculed this mode of resistance as counter-productive.

The rape and murder of two Kashmiri women, allegedly by men in uniform in 2009, added fuel to the fury. Kashmir was again on the streets demanding azadi. The initiation of the Quit Kashmir Movement by the Hurriyat Conference (G) and the Civil Disobedience Movement by Hurriyat (M) gave ownership and legitimacy to this mode of resistance. With Pakistan formally abandoning Musharraf's Four Point formula and different segments of the Hurriyat speaking in the same voice, Kashmir was again rebelling in 2010. The mobilisation transcended the Amarnath agitation of 2008 and the Moi-e-Muqaddas agitation of 1963. The reach of this movement went beyond Pir Panchal. It created an impact in the Chenab Valley, Poonch and Rajouri. While the Indian government had once attempted to suppress the average Kashmiri's aspiration for azadi in the name of war against terrorism, this new phase of dissent has allowed Kashmiris to keep resistance alive even through the worst of times.

The Indian state, instead of responding to the people's demands, is again involved in acts of self-deceit through media censorship, oppression, misinterpretation and manipulation.¹ It portrays the people's participation in elections as a symbol of peace, and a sign that the yearning for azadi has died. The world, however, knows that the regimentation of a society is often evident through high voter turnout. Saddam Hussein used to get more than 90% of his people's votes; the same was the case with the dictatorial regime of Hosni Mubarak and other totalitarian rulers of the Arab world and East Europe. Recently, the Syrian dictator, Bashar Al Assad, also claimed to have secured 84% votes in favour of his 'reform' package.

New Delhi is probably waiting for America's departure from Afghanistan, so that non-state actors can again get involved, and the Indian state can dispatch its foreign minister for negotiations to Kandahar. In Kashmir, in the meantime, no one expects to get azadi immediately. Every new phase of resistance in Kashmir has been more lethal than the preceding chapters. But the peaceful resistance of the recent past, in the form of the Quit India Movement, has mobilised Kashmiri society and passed the sentiment of azadi to new generations like a torch.

¹

- 1 See also: Kazi, Seema, 'Kashmir: Cri de Coeur', in Open Democracy, 16 July 2010 <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/seema-kazi/kashmir-cri-de-coeur>> [accessed 17 March 2013].

‘Love is Strong as Death’: The Moral Voice of the Kashmiri Tehreek



Shubh Mathur

‘Love is strong as death.’ I first came across these words in 1986, the year I came to the US as a graduate student. Amid all that was new and unfamiliar, these words, seen in passing on a monument in Providence, Rhode Island, as in a dream, remained clearly etched in memory as dreams will, urgent and compelling. I have been trying to understand them ever since. A series of crises, personal and collective (neither kind in short supply for an Indian), gave me a glimmer of understanding of the power of love and kindness to transcend death, cruelty, pain in their many forms. The words I read in Providence came back to me as I tried to understand the lives and what we call the activism of the families of the disappeared in Kashmir.

Despite 22 years of documentation and analysis, no one has been able to find a pattern in the disappearances. There is no demographic, geographic or social logic to who is arrested, who is released after torture, and who joins the ranks of the disappeared. The sole purpose and logic behind the disappearances is to create terror among the civilian population, to enact the random and absolute power of the armed forces, to break down popular support for the movement for independence. In this continuing chronicle of military terror, the families of the disappeared oppose a profoundly moral voice. Grief and love give the families the courage to confront and challenge this regime. Their very vulnerability, juxtaposed against the power of the army, casts into sharp focus its immorality and illegitimacy.

It becomes clear that words like ‘activism’ and ‘advocacy’, with their roots in Western liberal theory and the underlying idea of rational choice in political action, are completely inadequate for describing the compulsions of those living in a situation of political repression and military terror.¹ One

does not choose to search for a missing son or father – it is impossible to do otherwise. Family narratives illustrate the financial, physical and psychic costs of the search; the struggle to survive economically when a father, son or husband is taken away competes for primacy with the search. Families travel to prisons far from Kashmir where Kashmiri prisoners are held, to Indian cities and to the infamous Tihar jail in Delhi. They seek news from the army camps, from seers, from shrines and dreams. Children whose fathers have been disappeared grow up in orphanages when the mothers and families can no longer provide for them.

And yet, whether it has been 2 years since the disappearance or 20, it is impossible for the families to give up the search. They have become a symbol for the sorrow, suffering and endurance of the Kashmiri people under two decades of Indian army rule.

Dignity

The struggle for justice is not new to Kashmir, nor is the participation of women as its moral voice and compass. This history is, of course, unknown to most Indians. It is carefully suppressed in our textbooks, which tell only of the nation's righteous struggle for independence, not of the consequences of independence for the peoples trapped within the borders a nation inherited from the British, a nation defined as 'eternal India'. Kashmiri accounts are banned – be it Sheikh Abdullah's *Atish-i-Chinar*, which is out of print and impossible to find, or the works of Prem Nath Bazaz.

So this history has to be learnt, as I did, hearing it from those whose families lived it and helped shape it. I heard it for the first time in the New York home of Raja Muzaffar and his family. Raja Muzaffar was senior vice chairman and head of the diplomatic foreign affairs committee of the JKLF. In the United States, he works with the Kashmir Committee at the Dallas Peace Center. I met them for the first time in 2002, seeking to discover the unknown record of human rights abuses by Indian forces in Kashmir. What I did not expect was to be welcomed by the family as one of their own. This welcome has been repeated in scores of Kashmir homes, where I have visited the families of the disappeared, torture survivors, former prisoners, or victims of the multifarious forms of violence of the occupation.

Raja Saheb's uncle, Pir Maqbool Gillani, was one of the pioneers of the pro-democracy movement in Kashmir which began with the Reading Room Association created in the 1920s, to win the right for Kashmiri Muslims to be educated. This might seem like a limited demand, but to the oppressive Dogra regime, it was a direct challenge. The Dogras were military adventurers from the Jammu region, originally feudatories of the Sikh kingdom. They helped the British defeat the Sikhs, and as payment for this betrayal, they were allowed to 'buy' Kashmir for 75 lakh rupees in 1848. They proceeded to recover their investment by imposing heavy taxes on the Muslim majority population, and creating the foundations of a state in which the Muslims were not only exploited economically but also barred from any means of advancement. Muslims were banned from education, from employment by the state, from owning land, and from migrating to the plains to seek a better life. When these combined policies led to large-scale famine in the 1870s, there was no relief forthcoming. Local legend has it that hundreds of those who died of starvation were drowned by state officers in the lakes; it is claimed that some of the bodies can still be seen in the clear waters of Lake Wular. But by far the most hated imposition was the practice of forced labour or *begar*.

Religion became a staple of state identity, with all government and military power in the hands of a small Hindu minority, the Dogras and Pandits. The vast majority of the population remained disenfranchised and exploited tenant farmers and artisans. Efforts to challenge this state of affairs were bloodily suppressed.² Prison, torture, death and exile were the props of the administration. In a typically Kashmiri move, the first concerted and determined challenge to the Dogra rule took the form of a movement for popular education, democracy and justice. By 1931 the protests were in full swing, as was the repression.

Kashmiri women may not have been out on the street among the protestors shot down by the Dogra police, but they were an essential part of the moral vision of the movement. For Raja Saheb's aunt Badshah Begum, Mrs Pir Maqbool Gillani, the focus was on abolishing forced labour and the use of human beings as beasts of burden. This was grounded in a uniquely Kashmiri and Islamic vision of social and moral justice, of the dignity and worth of human beings, and a profound critique of the social practices which denied these. I heard this from Mrs Fatima Muzaffar, Raja Saheb's

wife, a remarkable woman who has shouldered the burdens of her own life with grace and courage.

Justice

It was in 1991 that Javed Ahmed Ahangar, then aged 17, was taken away by the army as he studied for his high school exams with his friend. He has never been seen or heard of since. His mother, Parveena Ahangar, has become a legend in Kashmir and beyond, as a woman who has not ceased searching for the truth about her son for more than 20 years. She always knew that she was not the only one to suffer this fate, and out of the little group of families that met at the courts, police stations, entrances to prisons and army camps, seeking the truth about their missing relatives, the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) was born. It has consistently demanded the truth about their missing relatives and justice for the crimes committed against them.³

I met Parveena for the first time in March 2007. We travelled together to remote villages in the border district of Kupwara. There were no telephones and the mail was erratic, slow and unreliable. This was her only way of reaching other families in remote and isolated villages and hamlets, to inform them of APDP plans. Late snow, thaw and spring rain produced a haunting beauty, characteristic of the Kashmir valley – fields and meadows, poplar-lined roads, streams and mountains. They also made the roads treacherous. Occasionally the way was blocked altogether, and the detours flooded, so we were driving through what appeared to be a small river. For my part, I expected us to be swept away in the rushing water, but the driver's skill in finding less-used roads and in driving under hazardous conditions brought us through mountain and forest to isolated homes and hamlets. In villages and towns surrounded by army camps, checkpoints, patrols and razor wire, we heard tales of disappearances, many of them already known to APDP and some being reported for the first time since the army arrived there 17 years earlier.

Finally, we were directed by our guide, a silent young man who had accompanied us from Srinagar in the morning, to a new case that was being brought to Parveena's notice. At Tragpora, the entire village was surrounded with barbed wire and armed soldiers, and our guide had to produce his ID

and an explanation for having visitors to his house. There we met the family of Manzoor Ahmed Wani, a young man who had been taken away to the army camp that dominated the area, a few months after his marriage in December 2001.⁴ Army officials first admitted that he was held there, and that the family need not worry about him. The colonel in charge was avuncular and concerned, asking the family to bring warm clothes for Manzoor. A week later, army officials denied ever having arrested him and began threatening and targeting the family systematically. The area was already in the grip of Ikhwanis terror. The Ikhwanis are counter-insurgency death squads, trained, armed, paid and protected by the army to terrorise the local population. Film-maker Sanjay Kak provides the following definition of the word and thus a glimpse into the logic of counter-insurgency:

Brother in Arabic. In Kashmir, Ikhwanis became a word for renegade, another word for collaborator. Its origins lay in the mid 90s, in Indian Security Forces buying up fringe militant groups, arming and protecting them, then unleashing them upon their own people.⁵

People were afraid to step outside their homes, even to cultivate their fields or graze their cattle. The family of Manzoor Ahmed Wani were made particular targets: The men from the family were taken almost in rotation to the nearby army camp, to serve as unpaid labour, as human shields in case of a militant attack, and on occasion to be tortured to persuade them to withdraw the case against the army.

Yet this regime of terror and violence was unable to break their spirit or their determination to find justice. On the day of our visit, one of the brothers had just returned from the camp. I explained my reasons for visiting and the idea that the disappearances should be carefully recorded and reported to the United Nations Human Rights High Commission in Geneva. On learning that I was a college professor living in the United States, their first question to me was: 'Can you put our story on the BBC?' The BBC wasn't interested, but the case of Manzoor Ahmed Wani became the first one reported to the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, and opened the way for collaboration between the APDP and the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights (UNHCHR). Since that time, APDP has become one of the best organised and most credible groups documenting human rights abuses in Kashmir.

The official Indian response to the APDP's struggle has been one of stunning indifference.⁶ Yet the moral vision of the APDP is aligned with the

principles of international human rights law, which is binding on all states. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines disappearances, along with torture, rape, and extrajudicial killings, as a crime against humanity. The international community owes the victims and society at large the truth about their missing relatives, justice for the crimes committed against them, and a political system in which these will not be repeated.⁷ There is no statute of limitations on crimes against humanity.

The monument in Providence stands on the campus of Brown University. It was built in 1904 by Nicholas Brown, after whom the university is named, in memory of his granddaughter Carrie Brown. He would have understood the grief of the families of the APDP, who recount a universal sorrow, of losing a child or parent, sibling or neighbour. Their loss however is not only due to the mischances of this world, but also because of an abduction deliberately carried out by an army of occupation, which then blocks all their efforts to discover the truth about the missing persons and to seek justice for the crime.⁸

Courage

In 2012, the repression has not diminished, only changed its form as the movement for Kashmiri independence returns to its roots as a popular mass movement. As the movement changes, so does the repression and its chosen victims. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this phase of the repression is the age of its victims. It is teenagers, young men and women in their 20s, and even children as young as 8 and 9 who are shot or beaten to death in the streets by police and paramilitary forces, or detained, tortured and charged with ‘waging war against the nation’.⁹ Despite a sustained campaign by Amnesty International to end the detention of minor children, the practice continues, in brazen and open defiance of international human rights conventions.¹⁰ Those released from prison tell harrowing tales of torture and sexual abuse. Lawyers representing these children in court receive death threats; journalists photographing children brought to the courts in handcuffs and chains are assaulted and beaten by the police; Facebook users posting pictures of children being arrested are also drawn into the cycle of prison and torture.

This latest phase of abuse reflects the utter confidence of the Indian establishment that it will never be called to account for its crimes by the international community. This is the fatal blind spot of power. What matters is that this terror will never be forgotten by Kashmiris, and that, instead of submission, it produces resistance. And what of the Indians? How do they feel about the torture and killing done in their name? A young Kashmiri woman, who cannot be named for reasons of safety, summarises for me her generation's experience and understanding of the years of Indian rule and repression: '*Hindustan ko sirf Kashmir ki zamin se matlab hai, yehan ke logo se nahin.* (India only cares about the land of Kashmir, not for its people.)' This simple truth encompasses all the strategies of nationalist appropriation whereby the captive borderlands become an 'eternal and inalienable' part of India, while their inhabitants are stigmatised as 'secessionist', 'anti-national' and 'terrorists'.

This strategy works only as long as the whole sorry story can be concealed, which is why the Indian establishment works so hard to silence those who would criticise its policies in Kashmir. The varied mishaps befalling David Barsamian, Angana Chatterjee, Ghulam Nabi Fai, Gautam Navlakha, Prashant Bhushan and Arundhati Roy all stand testimony to the many, subtle and ultimately fruitless efforts of the state and its allies to keep the truth from being known.

But the world does turn, empires crumble, and their allies are left high and dry among the many enemies they have made while riding the coat-tails of global power. As an Indian, I am always humbled to learn that our 'enemies' will be more generous to us than we deserve.

A Vision of Peace

In the six brief years of his tenure as chief minister, Sheikh Abdullah managed to put through a series of reforms that remain unique in South Asia. Land reforms that truly gave the land to the tiller, debt relief and a system of free universal primary education upended the very basis of the unjust and exploitative society created by the Dogras.

Images of Kashmir in India have changed over time. From being a Bollywood-and-tourist paradise the state has morphed into a conflict zone. What gets lost is the reality of a remarkable and successful experiment in

implementing social justice. This then may be the ultimate purpose of the silencing Kashmiri voices, which is the constant goal of the Indian establishment in media, politics and academics. What might India's dispossessed – the farmers struggling and failing to provide for their families, the Dalit students facing cruel discrimination in elite educational institutions – make of their knowledge of these reforms, enacted over 60 years ago in the midst of war, poverty and the chaos of partition? The moral vision of Kashmiri freedom might well serve all of South Asia. That may be what makes it so dangerous to established power.

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Why Am I a Stone Thrower?



Hashim

I am from Varmul, in the northern district of Kashmir, about 60 kilometres away from Srinagar.

When I was young I always believed that Kashmir was a part of Pakistan. It was only when I was in the sixth grade, after hearing about an ‘encounter’ in Jallamohalla, that I began to understand that there was a ‘conflict’ in Kashmir.

As children, we were always told not to look at army men on our way to school. My family members, my parents, had seen fake encounters, curfews, crackdowns and torture – they had seen it all. Through their stories and their instructions to stay away from the soldiers, I developed a deep hatred for the Indian army and local police. With every passing year, as I grew, this hatred too grew. In 2008 during the Amarnath land row, I understood that this army represented a country, India. That’s what the papers said and the elders would concur.

Kashmir carried the cries of dissent. But I didn’t join the stone throwers or participate in any of the protests then, because I was scared. Then in 2009, the double rape and murder in Shopian strengthened my understanding of the word ‘occupation’. I was close to taking my first step towards being a stone thrower. However, the actual turning point emerged from a very personal narrative.

Turning Point

It was 2010. There were mass protests going on and a curfew in Kashmir. My father, a doctor, had to go for duty. He left from Varmul for the hospital but he didn’t reach – he was beaten up ruthlessly by men from the armed

forces along the way. They pummelled him as if he had gone to steal something from them. He couldn't step out for weeks after that. How would any son react?

I felt so helpless when I saw his wounds. That day, I joined the stone throwers.

I told my parents that I was going out for some work. I took my mother's scarf to hide my identity. I didn't know how to wrap it round my face but did the best I could. Then I went to Cement Bridge, Varmul. There were others there, masked like me. No one knew who anyone was, or so it seemed. Worse, I didn't know how to throw stones and where or how to run if the cops came after us.

That first week, I followed the others; whatever they were doing, I did the same. For all those months of unrest in 2010, except for the one month I was in jail, I threw stones.

Once there was a police raid. They came running after us, towards the barbed wire in the middle of the bridge. (The bridge was divided by the barbed wire barricade placed in the centre, so that the throwers wouldn't cross.) When the police ran towards us, we threw the barbed wire into the river. We also threw their bedding into the river. That day they didn't cross the bridge. But the next day they took the help of the CRPF and crossed the bridge, firing tear gas shells and bullets, and we had to take cover.

We always run, but at times there is no way to go and we get caught. One day we were throwing stones on the bridge and four bullets were fired. I felt searing pain. The bullet had pierced my left arm. I had to stay at home for a week. By then, my family had learnt what I was up to. I tried to convince them it wasn't a bullet wound. My parents said that stone throwing wouldn't solve any issue. I remember my father saying, 'You study well and become something, then you can achieve your goals against India.' I was a teenager then, I didn't understand what he was saying.

Two weeks after I was shot, I was back throwing stones. I remember I was on the bridge, wearing a red shirt, and there was a CRPF man throwing stones. I took an iron rod and hit him. Blood started oozing from his face and that made the entire force angry. They started firing bullets at us, but below waist-level. Thanks to Allah, I wasn't hit by a live bullet, only a rubber one.

By then, I was a regular stone thrower. We used to have meetings in the evenings and I used to plan who would be in charge of covering certain areas. We had small groups and every group would have one leader.

People say that stone throwers are paid. That is bullshit. Rather, we cover all expenses. If anyone gets injured, we collect money and get him treated. Stone throwing would make our arms pain. To get relief, we had to take Voveron injections, which we paid for ourselves. No one would buy that for us.

Arrested

One day I was on the bridge, going to throw stones. A masked boy told me to go forward and I did. Suddenly, a police vehicle, Rakshak, came behind me. I ran for cover and policemen started chasing me. They fired a tear gas shell which hit my leg and I fell down. They beat me up, arrested me and took me away in the Rakshak to the police station. Another boy was already there. I was beaten up and they abused us continuously for days. The worst torture was being forced to piss on the coiled electric heater twice daily. I would pass out when the electricity surged through my body. At first, we were scared, but then the harsh beatings and torture made us stronger. After a few days we were taken to the sub-jail.

In the sub-jail we were not beaten up, but the food used to be stale and cold. It was the month of Ramzan so we had no option but to eat it. We would break our fast with that food. They used to give us only one glass of water during *Sehri*. We could not offer prayers as they would not allow us to make our ablutions. We were allowed out of the cell once a day. If, during the rest of the day, anyone had to answer nature's call, he had to piss in his pants. At such times, offering prayers was impossible.

There were many people in jail – stone throwers and militants mostly. We used to share stories of how we were arrested. In the early days after my arrest, I regretted throwing stones, but later, after the beatings and torture, my determination for the cause became firm. The more they beat us, the stronger our determination grew.

I was released a day before Eid and despite being tired, I, along with the other boy who had been in jail with me, raided around 60 policemen on the bridge. Just the two of us, we faced them all. The police and CRPF men

began throwing pellets and small stones using slingshots. If the police had recognised me, they would have pushed for my immediate arrest. But they didn't identify me.

Before my arrest, I used to wear pants and a shirt, but after my release from jail, I changed my attire to avoid recognition. I began to wear a *kurta* pajama. On the first evening of freedom, I met other stone throwers and they told me that it was a police informer masquerading as a stone thrower who had misled me. I don't know who he was.

On the second day of Eid, the Rapid Action Force (RAF) men were drunk. We went and stole their tear gas shells. For the next three days, we fired those shells at the forces. We couldn't take the shells home so we used to keep them safe under the bridge. At first, we didn't know how to use them but there was an unknown man who taught us. Perhaps he was a policeman. He also taught us how to make petrol bombs. The RAF and the policemen had plastic shields and these would burn when we would throw petrol bombs, when they would open fire at us.



When I was hit by a bullet and was in the hospital, there was another injured boy lying beside my bed. He had been shot in his chest and the treatment would cost him 2.5 lakh rupees. His father was a poor man and couldn't afford such a huge amount. When the leader of Hurriyat Conference, Syed Ali Geelani came to see the injured persons, the father of this injured boy asked for some money for his son's treatment. Geelani replied that he hadn't called for stone throwing, but only for peaceful protests. Geelani, in his call for protests, had asked us to sit outside army camps. But I ask you, would the soldiers offer us flowers there? Wouldn't they fire at us?

I started throwing stones to avenge the physical pain inflicted on my father. But then gradually I understood what the larger cause was. All day long, we used to throw stones and later in the evening, there were discussions. In those discussions, we would sit and talk about the movement, the economy and the ultimate goal – azadi. We'd speak of the dictatorship India helms in Kashmir, about how when people ask questions about gross human rights violations and killings, the case closes. We'd discuss how in the Shopian double rape and murder case, no one was arrested. The case is still going on.

Some members then would point out that we have water resources which can bring us economic development. Also we could generate income from electricity, metals, agriculture, fruits, medicinal plants, toll taxes, if we get freedom. We could potentially develop our economy through all of these assets. Today, whatever income the state gets, goes to the Indian government's coffers, but after independence, every single penny of our economy will go to Kashmir. Therefore, if a tourist comes to Kashmir, after azadi, his investment will help the locals. As for defence, if the Indian army leaves, we have enough unemployed youth who will join Kashmir's own army. We can build our economy and defence strategy ourselves and sustain an independent country.

During our daily discussions, everyone used to support the hardcore leaders. We would read the newspapers for information about how many were killed, the curfew deals, and the calls from pro-freedom leaders. I completely reject India's theory that stone throwers are unemployed, impoverished or uneducated youth. With me, there were boys studying in universities or those who came from well-off families. Everyone used to throw stones.

During my stone throwing days, I had a Facebook account under a fictitious name. I would use that to inform people what we had done during the day. I used to post updates about stone throwing and paste pro-freedom slogans. I still run that account but it doesn't have anything in the inbox. It's not unusual for an Indian to write on that page, and comment: 'You people are dependent on India and are throwing stones!' How can one respond to such self-important statements?

The truth is, the police also used to talk to us when the situation was calm. They used to say that they were fed up of the situation, and that India caused trouble. They used to then assert: 'Don't throw stones, it won't get any results.' Once, a policeman told me: 'When you are jailed, you will stop throwing stones.' I told him if I hadn't gone to jail, I might have been at home, and not by the bridge.

We loved talking to the police as they would tacitly support the stone throwers. They would give us leather straps which were used to hold barbed wire. And we would use those to make slingshots. When there was stone throwing, the local police would retreat and the Jammu and Kashmir Armed Police would come to the front.

There were many informers within the group of stone throwers. Several 'top' stone throwers were in fact police informers. They would get paid by the police to divulge intelligence so stone throwers could get arrested. Meena Kumari, a top stone thrower, used to attack with us. But we were never sure whose side he was on. We later got to know that he used to work with both the police and us.

Many people were killed where I lived. I still remember a local vendor who was murdered. When we began throwing stones that day, there was a boy who was closing his fruit shop. Some oranges from his shop rolled to the ground. As he stooped to pick them up, a CRPF man rushed from the bridge. The CRPF man was wearing a uniform with red shoes and a belt that indicated he was an officer. He shot the boy in the chest with an AK-47 rifle from a distance of a few meters. When we heard two bullet shots, we ran for cover and that CRPF man and others approached the boy's body. The man with red shoes kicked him to one side to turn his face towards him, and others hit the body twice with a bamboo stick to see if he was dead. He was dead. With this confirmed, they went into the lanes and by-lanes of the old town in search of the stone throwers. But we overpowered them and they had to run away to the other side of the bridge. We returned to the scene of murder, went to see if we could help that boy, but he was indeed dead.

The CRPF men that day killed the shopkeeper. The JK Police doesn't do much. They tell us: 'Run away, CRPF men will come and they will open fire.' Even in jail, it was the armed police who would beat or torture us and not the 'normal' police. The normal police would offer us drinking water. Back then, we had an unwritten rule that stone throwers won't attack policemen. Rather they will focus on the CRPF men. If they happened to show sympathy to our cause, we had to reciprocate with kindness.

Of course, there is always the chance that I will be caught. Am I scared? No. Because what more can they do now? The government can only arrest me and beat me up or else kill me. I am not scared of that.

Post-2010 Mass Protests

After the end of the 2010 protests, the proportion was 2:1. If there were 10 stone throwers, there were 20 armed personnel.

Stone throwing declined to some extent because of informers. It became a business proposition for squealers. There was a bounty offered for the arrest of stone throwers. A mole would be paid Rs 30,000-40,000 if he revealed the identity of a dissenter. Some people were informers right from the beginning, while for others the role provided a secure cover – they would solve their personal disputes with the help of the police for whom they were working. Once we were beating up a boy we suspected of being an informer; I found his identity card and he was a policeman. Then a police vehicle came along firing tear gas shells and we had to leave him. They took him away in the vehicle.

Stone throwing has never failed to get a response. It has in fact spurred a positive development. The government today knows that if they again unleash terror, there are people who will react. They were deaf to peaceful protests – Kashmir has had a long history of benign movements. But nothing changed.

The truth is, non-violent movements are successful only when they erupt as a whole, not piecemeal. Everyone should come together. But there is no unity among people in Kashmir. Some people want an independent Kashmir, a few wish to align with Pakistan, and others with India. The leaders themselves are not one. When there is Hurriyat (M) and Hurriyat (G), how can we expect harmony among the people? One train and several engines. How can this train run? The Kashmir conflict is without a resolution because both people and their leaders lack a common vision, and also because Kashmiris are ignored when India and Pakistan have talks on the issue.

In my view, it is imperative to demand freedom from all external countries. Pakistan and China should leave those parts of Kashmir that they are occupying. Jammu and Kashmir should be independent. There are examples of several small countries in the world. When they can survive as independent states, why can we not?

Kashmir has Muslims in majority, so Islamic rule can be implemented here. The minorities will get their rights. I don't say that everything will be perfect in an independent Kashmir, but we will build this country from scratch and have ideals in place. We will have a sense of ownership. It's true, we need leaders. Today I see what happens in Pakistan for want of governance. We will work towards having an able person in control, so an independent Kashmir, even with Islamic rule, won't be like Pakistan.

In the meantime, we need support. Kashmiri youth are venturing outside the state and telling others what happens here. The media in Kashmir is sadly a puppet. So we need more good people – artists, singers, internet users, writers, journalists – who can tell the stories of our land. You can't always rely on the United Nations for global support, especially when it is controlled by the United States of America.

I look back at the history of India. The country had nothing when it got independence from the British. But the British made India a country anyway. Why then can't we build our own independent country?

(As told to and transcribed by Fahad Shah. The second name of the author is withheld on request.)

How I Understood Kashmir's Resistance



Freny Manecksha

An image of an avenue of poplar trees that I have uploaded on Facebook gets several 'likes' and the inevitable 'heaven on earth' comments. But the pretty picture is not the real story. The haunting beauty of the archetypical Kashmir sidewalk on a soft autumnal afternoon is inextricably linked with the horrific narratives I heard that day. I view the image as an exercise in examining whether looking is the same as seeing and how we choose to see selectively. As a journalist I am reminded of how important it is to look at things that may not be in the frame and how one must continuously explore different ways of looking.

The image was shot on one of the last few days of October 2010 as we drove back from Kreeri in Varmul district. I was accompanied by a friend who had been working in Srinagar during that momentous year and another young Kashmiri journalist.

My arrival in Kashmir from Mumbai had been born out of an impulse. My curiosity had been stoked by the buzzing activity on Facebook – the video clips of huge street protests, the grim body count of the numbers killed or injured, updates on the curfew, and its counter-offensive in the form of shutdowns in the Calendar of Protests. Newspapers however carried only fragmented accounts and television offered incoherent babble. Woefully, even as a journalist I had hardly any sense of the history but I did feel compelled to make a trip, interact with as many Kashmiris as possible and gain some first-hand impressions.

The very afternoon of my arrival, plans were made to visit Palhalan and Kreeri the next day where a non-stop 35-day curfew was to be lifted. We were keen to gather reports of what had happened in these villages that had remained cut off from Srinagar and had borne the brunt of repressive

tactics. Palhalan, I was told, had witnessed several protests and students from this region had been particularly targeted.

On the highway just at the turnoff for Tappar village was a big RR camp. Fortunately our vehicle was not stopped and in the village we were met by two students, Rameez and Fayaz (names changed) who took us into their home. We hunkered down to listen to their accounts of days and nights of incarceration when troops from this RR camp patrolled the alleys and fields 24x7. At night the forces came right up to their windows. Villagers were not allowed to venture out even into their own apple orchards to pick the ripening fruit.

Those who defied the unrelenting curfew were brutally shot or savagely beaten. On the street we met a youth who rolled up his pant and showed us his bullet wound. RR troops had opened fire when he and six of his friends had stepped out to offer prayers for a person who had been killed. The youth got wounded but managed to flee in a vehicle. The troops began to hunt for him and stopped the car in which he was being driven to hospital. The window screen was smashed and the gun used as a club to rain blows on his torso and chest. 'Finally we managed to speed away. I begged a doctor to extract the bullet because there was no way I would risk the journey to Srinagar.'

At the Kreeri Block Hospital, Dr Khursheed Ali Khan, the block medical officer confirmed to us that he often handled four or five cases of alleged beatings a day during that curfew. And that two persons who had brought the injured to hospital were picked up by security troops who had entered the complex. He spoke of the difficulties that the medical profession faced in coming to work and how even ambulances were stopped by the military. He also told us about the post-mortem conducted on 18-year-old student, Syed Farrakh Bukhari, whose body was found outside Choora police station.¹ The face was unrecognizable because it had been burnt by acid and one hand had been amputated. Although the viscera report was awaited the body carried visible signs of torture.

Farrakh's father, Basheer Ahmed Bukhari told us his son stepped out of the house a day after Shab-e-Barat (Night of Forgiveness) when he heard news of a protest in the market place. That was the last his family saw of him until 14 days later when his mutilated body surfaced outside Choora police station.

These narratives that I have recorded in detail were what brought about a tectonic shift in my perspectives. As we drove back, stopping briefly amidst the serene poplars and canals, I began to realise how views on Kashmir had been coloured by accounts put out by the state and a media that took its line from it. I had been given to believe that Kashmir was a militancy-hit state. But I learnt that it was, in fact, also a heavily militarised state.

In the course of a single day I had heard vivid and chilling accounts that were a reflection of what living in the world's most highly militarised zone was all about. You could be shot and left paralysed for daring to step out of your home during a curfew. That is what happened to Haneefa Begum of Kreeri, a single mother whose crime was being desperate enough to get medical attention for her 12-year-old daughter suffering from typhoid. (Haneefa died seven months later leaving behind a deeply traumatised and anguished child.)²

Your son, 'the family's chief hope' could leave home and never return. His mutilated body would be casually dumped outside a police station.

Your privacy could be violated any time by troops entering your home or poking a gun through the window as they patrolled your fields. You could routinely be interrogated by outsiders and forced to prove your identity in your own village.

Expectations of justice would be a Kafkaesque experience. Draconian laws like the AFSPA and the PSA have engendered a blanket of such huge immunity that no sanction has ever been given to prosecute any security personnel for rape, torture or murder in the past two decades and more.

The six days that I spent in 2010 were a kind of watershed. I realised how crucial it was to go beyond mere reportage. I had to try understanding a little more of a conflict that, I was warned, had many layers and where nothing could be taken at surface level.

I returned to Srinagar six months later along with a few journalists. Looking at the crowds and traffic I remarked it seemed particularly busy. My friend said with a smile this was the lull, the 'peaceful' phase. Shortly after, the national papers began chanting the 'all is well' mantra. But, by increasingly engaging with Kashmiris, I started seeing how 'well' lies only in the eyes of the beholder.

A little after my arrival, the police stopped the Sumo taxi service in which a bunch of students and I were travelling to the Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) at Awantipora. The students had to pull out identity papers. I, the stranger, did not. But this is 'normal', the youngsters assured me.

That summer my vision continued to expand as I saw how media stories were at odds with the language of Kashmir's own narratives. I began looking analytically at the national discourse which portrayed its own picture of what is normal and what constitutes peace and shut its eyes to the repression and mountain of injustices. One morning whilst reading Edward Said's *Peace and Its Discontents* in my room I was struck by the relevancy of his observation that 'peace really means peace between equals; it means freedom and equality for both peoples, not just one, nor peace for one as a lesser appendage to the other, who has full rights and security.'³

The summer saw beauty aplenty. First the tulips and then the other flowers began blooming. Bus-loads of tourists flocked to the gardens. I chose the Chashma Shahi Botanical gardens where young Kashmiri schoolgirls marched in crocodile form. Soon the crocodile broke up and the girls played leap frog or ran about animatedly. Under a willow tree I sat and watched. A Kashmiri gentleman called out, 'So do you remember your own childhood?' I nodded. It was a morning of pure pleasure possibly because I was realising just how ephemeral such moments can be and how simple enjoyments like a school outing, a picnic or even a walk are luxuries that Kashmiris can never take for granted.

A day or two later, 22-year-old Malik Sajad, artist, cartoonist and graphic artist spoke of his experiences whilst growing up. 'My memories of childhood are located largely indoors. Politics was an ingrained part of our life. You could not escape it. It forced us to grow up and mature fast.' His most telling cartoon of those years depicts a little boy opening his house door to find his cricket ball nestled in the midst of a pair of menacing jackboots.

Another fiery college student told me, 'I do not think I ever really felt safe, not even during those so-called normal periods. Death and violence were very much a part of our lives in Islamabad district. We were frisked before we went into the school bus. I grew up idolising militants but we kept hearing of their deaths one by one.'

It was such disclosure by several boys that forced me to confront my own very problematic questions regarding ‘separatist’ sentiments. Such sentiments have never been allowed space in our consciousness. My thinking had been shaped by a media that looks at issues through a prism of nationalism. Dare one look at a situation with different eyes? Could one refer to the struggles as ‘pro-freedom’ rather than ‘separatist’? Could there be some truth in the argument that the struggle for political rights has been delegitimised by portraying it as part of global Islamisation?

It was Malik Sajad’s brilliant short animation film *Hopscotch* staged at a college’s film festival that opened my eyes. The film began with frames of grown people drawing squares for the game of hopscotch which later transformed into a map with dots outlining the borders of a nation. The next few frames were of a Hangul or Kashmiri stag deer that galloped and ran free over wide expanses but then became entangled in the barbed wire of boundaries. Sajad explained that he saw the Hangul as an ‘apt metaphor for the innocence of the azadi demand’ by Kashmiris who have had to bear the burden of partition.

I began discovering the rich trove of Kashmiri narratives and came to understand the compelling need of artists to write themselves into history and so negate the chimera of normality. Journalist Majid Maqbool told me, ‘There is this urge in the younger generation to remember everything. We write back to power and counter the state narrative. This writing is part of the ongoing struggle against forgetfulness.’

I began to realise how history is constructed in memory or perhaps even ‘re-memory’ – that wonderful word coined by Toni Morrison in her chronicle of slavery, *Beloved*. The past is organic and therefore always held alive in memory.

Arif Ayaz Parrey, writer and legal activist told me how it is only natural that for a society like Kashmir, where ‘the very basic human freedoms of life, liberty, thought and expression are under threat for political reasons, the only honest art and literature coming out will concern themselves with these issues pertinently.’ I read his short story, *A Victorious Campaign* based on the real life of a mystic or *mott* from his home village in Islamabad. Azad, the mystic, had chosen to abandon the realm of ‘thoughtfulness in favour of mindless freedom’. While he attempted to roam free, he failed to understand why the doors of a military camp were shut to him. Parrey’s story demonstrates how ‘irony, metaphor, elliptical

allusions and satire can be masterfully deployed as weapons in living and writing through these times.’

There were other spectacularly creative forms of dissent. Filmmaker and playwright Arshad Mushtaq, who I met in a cafe near the flowing Jhelum, spoke of how an incident he witnessed in his childhood – of a youth’s head being repeatedly smashed against an electric pole by soldiers – remained deep in his subconscious. Years later the bloody memory was regurgitated as a telling symbol in his play *Su Yee*, which uses the traditional Bhand Pather (Kashmiri folk theatre) for an adaption of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*.

He also shared with me the abiding allure of Kashmir’s iconographic figure, Habba Khatoon, the legendary 16th century peasant woman who defied tradition to marry Yusuf Shah Chak, Kashmir’s last ruler. They shared very transitory days of bliss, for in a little while, Yusuf Shah was imprisoned by Akbar. Habba Khatoon, who spent her remaining years in an endless pursuit of memory and love, personifies beauty in pain. She yearns to breathe free and longs for the bliss that was so fleeting. The element of search, of an unfulfilled dream and the twin strands of beauty and suffering, says Mushtaq, is read as Kashmir’s own story.

Gradually I began to understand some of Kashmir’s rich cultural psyche and the language of resistance. I tried to look at the practices and rites of memorialising, of loss, of martyrdom. On a cold rainy morning I visited Parveena Ahangar, whose son was forcibly disappeared. Parveena was unlettered. But she was able to turn her personal grief into collective mourning and asked for justice by founding the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, a movement against enforced disappearances.⁴

As I collected these stories, I began to empathise with the compelling need to pour to the streets whenever a killing took place and saw how anger and loss gave birth to potent political statements. Images of street protests carried in the social media acquired new subtexts. I heard the voices of those who explained why a generation of boys, who had grown up in the shadow of the gun and strife of the 90s, felt emboldened and whipped off their shirts to stand in machismo defiance against the CRPF. This was certainly not in consonance with the mainstream media that had tried to portray stone throwers as those who had been paid by Pakistani agents or frustrated unemployed youths.

I also started to look at incidents in the light of historic continuity. Protests with stone throwing, I was told by 58-year-old Mehraj-ud-din Malik, had occurred way back in 1964. He recollected how his best friend, 11-year-old Abdul Rashid Wani, had died in one such incident near Nowhatta Chowk and was buried in the martyrs' graveyard at Khawaja Bazaar.

Graves and graveyards were to take on even more meaning during my third trip made in autumn of 2011.



People who die bad don't stay on the ground.

– Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

The trees were awash with colours of gold and russet in November, complementing the unabashed paeans to tourism that had been sung all summer. But on the ground very different sagas were unfolding. The presence of anonymous, unmarked graves had always been an open secret in Kashmir, not just near the LoC but even in Srinagar. The state though had dismissed all reports of these and maintained unmarked graves contained the remains of foreign militants.

But in August 2011 an inquiry headed by senior superintendent of police, Bashir Itoo, under the state's Human Rights Commission, corroborated these tales. It declared beyond doubt that 'unmarked graves containing unidentified dead bodies do exist at various places in North Kashmir.' The report admitted police claims had been falsified and 'thereby increased the probability that these unidentified bodies may be those of disappeared persons.'

The SHRC report's admission that such graves existed not just in North Kashmir and the LoC but in many other districts as well, impelled us to set out on short trips to South Kashmir's Shopian, Kulgam, Bijbehara, Frisal and also to the outskirts of Srinagar to gather accounts of such graves from local populations.

For three or four days we spoke to people who narrated how graveyards had sprung up adjoining police stations or in parks. Gravediggers and others spoke of personally burying unidentified dead bodies handed over by the military and police. They described the state of

the bodies that bore visible signs of torture. ‘His eyes had been gouged out and two marbles inserted.’ ‘The throat had been slit.’ Young boys spoke of finding bodies flung into drains and corners of the town or even outside a school.

A woman in a hamlet in Kulgam told me, ‘There is perhaps not a single village in Kashmir which does not have at least four or five anonymous graves. This was a common feature from the 90s up until around 2008.’ Even in Srinagar, we discovered such anonymous graves. At Chanapora near Harvan, the beautiful park to which thousands of tourists flock, villagers told us of how these anonymous graves sprang up in the graveyard when they were confined to their homes during a cordon and search operation six years ago.

The fabled Dal Lake too was disgorging its deep dark secrets. Boys playing cricket near Kralangri told us they remembered two instances of unidentified bodies of youths being fished out. One had signs of injuries on the face and another had bullet marks.

All these grisly tales and accounts added up to one big story – the complete and blatant breakdown of all codes and procedures to be followed by the police, the state and security troops, and the consequent lack of accountability.

But this story hardly ever appeared in national discourse. In fact so deep was the deniability that even the implications of the SHRC report were all but buried in many national dailies. The refusal to allow DNA tests to be carried out to cross-check whether samples from the remains of these graves matched with those of next of kin of the disappeared prompted the remark by Arif Ayaz Parrey that this was a ‘double disappearance’.

On my part I am continually reminded of the lines from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* when the witches beguile the protagonist by playing with ideas of truth and appearances. Eventually, Macbeth remarks: ‘And nothing is but what is not.’⁵

Do we see, do we not?

1 ‘Curfew in Parts of Kashmir as a Precautionary Measure’, *The Indian Express*, 11 August 2010 <<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/curfew-in-parts-of-kashmir-as-a-precautionary-measure/658965>> [accessed 17 March 2013].

- 2 Maneeksha, Freny, 'What Haneefa Left Behind', in Kashmir Dispatch <<http://www.kashmirdispatch.com/feature/22064087-what-hanifa-left-behind.htm>> [accessed 17 March 2013].
- 3 Said, Edward, *Peace and Its Discontents: Essays on Palestine in the Middle East Peace Process* (New York: Vintage, 1996), p 25.
- 4 Ara, Nusrat, 'Decades Into Conflict, Thousands Still Missing', *Global Press Institute*, 25 November 2009.
- 5 Shakespeare, William, *Macbeth*, 1.3.141-142.

The Portrait of a Stone Thrower as a Blind Man



Sameer Yasir

On the evening of 18 September 2010 a bright sun was sliding behind the mighty mountains of the North Kashmir town of Varmul. The summer of stone throwing battles and paramilitary forces firing upon the protesters, which had already killed around 110 and injured hundreds more, was merging into an autumn of discontent. On a massive bridge over River Jhelum flowing through the town, teenage boys were collecting stones, keeping the supplies intact for stone throwers. Rebellious Kashmiris had taken to borrowing from the vocabulary of cricket to describe their battles with the forces as '20/20' or 'The Match'. One of the stone throwers in the match that evening was a 19-year-old, Aamir Kabir. Aamir was at the bridge for every battle, a stone in his hand. 'I wouldn't return home till we pushed the police back from the bridge all the way to the police station,' Aamir recalled.

That evening, on Cement Bridge, paramilitary forces armed with guns and bamboo sticks were ready to battle the young stone throwers. Aamir had joined his friends in the battle, his wiry arms shooting a barrage of stones at the uniforms. He had a reputation for having mastered the perilous practice of stone throwing. Devising techniques to overcome the 'bullets with stones' would be Aamir's only concern during the 2010 summer unrest. His mother sought in vain to stop him, but Aamir seemed possessed.

On that September evening, Aamir rushed forward to the centre of the bridge, aiming yet another stone, when a CRPF man hiding behind an armoured car stepped out and fired a pellet gun. He had had Aamir in his cross hairs and aimed right. Aamir felt a stab of pain, closed his eyes instinctively. A moment later, he raised his head to the bright sky above and opened his eyes. The sky had disappeared in a sheet of darkness. Aamir

couldn't see anything. Hundreds of boys have been injured and many have died on Varmul's Cement Bridge.

Aamir's father, Abdul Kabir Beigh, had migrated along with his family from Sultanpora Kandi, a far-flung village in the border district to Varmul town in the early 1990s. He had staked most of his meagre resources on educating Aamir, hoping it would help them all climb out of poverty. Days before Aamir was hit in his eye, he had appeared for his 12th grade exams. His examination card hung on a wall of his room.

Old town Varmul is a congested area with narrow lanes and old mud brick houses, and has always remained the hot bastion. It has witnessed protests at every hostile attempt of paramilitary forces. Separatist politics has dominated the discourse in this part of the town for decades.

I walked through the old town to meet Aamir, whose family lived in a single room, partially lit, and painted yellow. I found him sitting like a traditional Kashmiri *pir* (mystic), a blanket covering him, his hands exposed, holding prayer beads.

The room was their bedroom, their living room, and their kitchen. In a corner Aamir's mother, Jahan Ara bent over a gas stove and made tea for us. I had met Aamir briefly in a hospital after he had been injured. He had been in pain, crying, and yet spoke to me about his days of rage.

It had been two years since we had met. His face was swollen. He remembered my voice and raised his right hand to welcome me. He lifted it in a direction away from me; I moved a bit and shook his hand.

His father had worked as a peon in a modest local school and now sold second-hand garments on a footpath in the town. Aamir had spent most of the past two years in the silence of their single room. Friends, who eulogised his courage, stopped visiting after a few months. 'I live with my solitude now,' he told me. 'It seems, it will stay with me till I go to my grave.' He fidgeted his hands and said, 'It is this silence which has been with me for more than a year now. I miss the thrill of the protests and stone throwing but even if I could see, I would never return to stone throwing again.' His voice brimmed over with bitterness, disappointment. 'Why should I?' he asked. 'What for?'

His anger was the anger of a man who had been ignored, let down by his society, by the political leaders who spoke for Kashmir. 'We were left alone by everyone. Do only the poor have to suffer for azadi? Nobody cared

about the dead and the injured once the protests stopped,' said Kabir Beigh, his father, a gaunt man in his late 40s.

To meet the high cost of Aamir's medical treatment, Beigh sold his ancestral land in the village. He took Aamir to the top medical institutions in Srinagar, but his condition didn't improve. When Beigh took Aamir to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, the ophthalmologists there had bad news. 'You are late by 20 days. We could have saved his eyes if you had come earlier,' Beigh was told. The bad judgments of the doctors in Kashmir had proved disastrous. 'One injection would cost 7,000 rupees. I had the feeling that at least one of his eyes could be saved, but nothing helped,' Beigh sighed. 'We lost everything.'

Their neighbours and townsfolk had lent a hand in the early days. 'But then people forget you,' Ara, his mother said. 'And our leaders are the worst,' she said, as hurtful memories covered her eyes in grief. As they struggled to put together the money for his treatment, Aamir was compelled to call a senior separatist leader who is the chairman of a pro-freedom group. 'He told me on the phone that I was trying to mint money out of all this. My condition meant nothing to him,' he recalled. 'He disconnected the call.'

Disappointed and hurt by the leader's callousness, Aamir and his father approached the hardliner, Syed Ali Shah Geelani. 'We went to meet him at his house in Srinagar. After we left someone came with an envelope, which had 5,000 rupees in it. What could I do with that? I cried and asked Father to give back the money,' Aamir told me.

The reception he was met with when he approached separatist leaders made him rethink the idea of azadi. Before he had been hit in his eye, he and other stone throwers were eulogised by the Hurriyat leaders for being 'torchbearers of the freedom struggle' and 'the real heroes of the movement'. Now Aamir looked back in anger. 'They are a selfish lot, who only care about themselves and their families.'

After Aamir's condition was reported by the local press, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah promised to bear his medical expense. 'Omar Abdullah too forgot and did nothing.' Aamir couldn't walk without support and for the most part, stayed inside the room, talking to his mother.

Kashmir has seen the worst of times in the last 23 years, ever since armed rebellion against Indian rule started. The shift in the movement from arms to stones did change the contours of the struggle, but it proved costly

for ordinary people. Incredibly, even after tragic stories like Aamir's came to the forefront, stone throwing continued on the streets of the Valley, especially in 2008 and 2010. Separatists continued to present themselves as leading figures during these spontaneous movements but the youth proved to be the torchbearers. Thousands of boys were injured and many faced the same fate as Aamir.

Aamir can't see this world again. He has given up his fight for azadi. His interaction with leaders and the responses of members of his community have robbed him of the hope that those who protest will be looked after.

Society plays an important role in shaping a people's movement in any nation. Witnessing the change in Aamir after his world turned dark alters the movement in itself. There are hundreds of Aamirs in today's Kashmir. But the lack of a helping hand has made them suspect the intentions of the very people they are fighting for. Fortunately, the idea of azadi still glimmers. While Kashmir, like any other conflict zone in the world, has seen betrayals, the goal of freedom has remained somewhere in the hearts of people like Aamir.

Today, the air of negative peace prevails in the Valley. Beneath the surface, the situation is volatile. The million dollar question then is this – will the people, who used to be a part of an unorganised army of volunteers, take over the streets again, despite a long history of treachery? Will they hold the state accountable? Only time will tell.

Longing

Every time I tell this story I feel as if a sharp knife is lacerating my wound again. These walls are my only companion and they don't ask me anything.

– Mughli

Hum Ko Unn Ki Maut Ki Certificate Mill Gayee, Ab Dua Karo Woh Zinda Hoon¹



Ather Zia

Autumn 2011

Fateh Jaan stood under the *chinar* trees opposite an army bunker near the famous Polo View Road in Srinagar. The autumnal glow crackled around. Looking past me, Fateh said, '*Hum ko unn ki maut ki certificate mill gayee, ab dua karo woh zinda hain hoon.* (We have got his death certificate, now pray that he is alive.)'

Fateh's oxymoronic expressions carry a decree of death and wish for life for the same man: her husband Naseeb Khan, who had been forcibly 'disappeared' by the Indian army 10 years ago. Fateh's life had become an unending paradox, as for many other women like her in Kashmir.

Fateh came to be known as a half-widow, a unique term that has been coined in Kashmir to categorise the wives of disappeared persons, for those who lurk between the rough edges of spousal life and death. Half-widows occupy a strange place, a no-man's land, rather a no-woman's land. In this world of disappearance, the possibility of the husband being alive and languishing in some unknown jail is as high as the likelihood of him being interred in some unidentified grave or worse, his body being thrown into a river or forest. Fateh, like many other half-widows, did not have the luxury of having a dead body or the privilege of knowing the address of any jail where her husband could be. So she was constantly on the run between a notional *Safa* and *Marwa*,² between memories and the call of the moment – a hungry child or chores, between yearning and temporary relief or justice. She'd straddle the world of hope and despair, and live with a constant erasure and restitution of hope.

After our meeting, Fateh went to see Baba, a mystic seer who divined Naseeb's predicament and prayed for his safe return. I imagine Fateh in my mind, putting the talisman that Baba gives her in the same satchel that holds the death certificate. She will then proceed towards her home where her five children wait. The youngest one, Zaina who is too young to remember her father, will once again dream of him coming back. She will wake up in a screaming fit, and in a few moments the entire household will melt into tears. Hardly anyone will go back to sleep. Fateh will lament Naseeb's disappearance, curse 'Hindostan', the 'Hindostani' army, her fate, and the apathy of non-existent leaders.

Fateh Jaan lived in a small pastoral hamlet outside Srinagar. Her tiny unfinished brick house lay nestled in the foothills of the Zabarwan Mountains, overlooking the velvety paddy fields below. Fateh's house could be that comforting abode where you stop for directions or refill your water flask. It could even become that one photograph you 'facebook' in the evening. When you look at Fateh Jaan's house you expect ruddy faces and happy smiles at the doorway. But what will welcome you is Fateh's deeply lined face, the starkness of her home and the near nakedness of her children with pasty, chapped faces thanks to the approaching Himalayan winter.

Fateh was roughly 44 years of age, but she looked older. Her eldest daughter, Rubina was 20 years old. Hanief, her second-born was 17; followed by Ashraf who was 15; Ayman, 13 years; and Zaina, around 11. Fateh's husband, Naseeb Khan disappeared in custody of the Indian armed forces in 2002. Naseeb, a cattle herder was taken by the army from their *kotha*. A *kotha* is a temporary residence in the mountains which pastoral people occupy in summer while they tend the flocks of big cattle farmers.

One afternoon, Naseeb was sleeping when soldiers showed up. This was not unusual. The soldiers would often comb the mountainside for militants. It was routine during these expeditions for the soldiers to beat and torture the men, sometimes in their own homes. The women also received beatings, but more than that they had to face obscenities, ogling and physical harassment. When Fateh would remember their remarks and acts, which she would label as '*besharam*' or shameless, she would grow tremulous with anger. There would also be easier visits sometimes when the soldiers would only demand water or tea and resort to mild kicking, slapping and badmouthing. 'It was very unpredictable, I would just keep chanting holy verses from the Quran, praying for it to be over,' said Fateh.

The army would show up at people's doors at any time especially during the night enquiring about the *mujahids*. In the early days of the movement, till the late 90's, the *mujahideen* would seek refuge in homes. People would acquiesce for various reasons. There was fear of the gun – of retribution if they refused, and many felt proud about sheltering militants. The army, on the other hand, was viscerally abhorred. The soldiers were seen as a brute occupational force that would descend on them at any time. They would bring the entire neighbourhood under crackdown, which included identification parades and house searches. Harassment was a matter of policy. The army did not hesitate to go on a rampage, ransacking homes and beating people. They were not only after the *mujahideen* but also vengeful towards common people. Fateh Jaan's house, unfortunately just by the road, would often turn into a makeshift interrogation centre. Fateh shivered at the memory of men moaning and the wounded people she had to retrieve in the aftermath.

When Naseeb was taken, Fateh thought it was the routine *pooch taach* – a euphemism for detainment, primarily for 'questioning'. During *pooch taach*, the family harbours hopes of imminent if not immediate release, for broken bones if not death (though there are no guarantees). During earlier detentions, Naseeb had returned badly beaten, barely alive. In her mind, Fateh was readying herself to nurse him back to health. She knew he would be tortured despite his non-involvement with the armed movement. It would take him days to recover and the family would fall on hard times. Fateh would take up small jobs in the neighbourhood to make ends meet.

After Naseeb's arrest, Fateh began the excruciating routine which countless Kashmiri wives, mothers, or families undertake to find their kin. Accompanied by a few elderly neighbours and her brothers, Fateh would search in army camps, where the officers would deny arresting Naseeb. The local police station would not accept her FIR (First Information Report) and would suggest she keep enquiring from the army. The army officers would refuse to divulge any information and send her back to the police. Utterly defeated, Fateh would return home before it would turn dark – the time when an undeclared curfew would begin in the whole of Kashmir.

Nights had always been challenging in the village. The soldiers would come knocking, demanding tea or a room to rest. To avoid this, Fateh's entire family would leave their home to spend the night in the safety of some other house. Fateh would say, 'The soldiers would be drunk, and

unreasonable, they would swear at us, they would barge inside, and keep us under siege; those moments were hell.' Fateh believed that the soldiers had ulterior motives; asking for tea or questioning was just a *bahana*, a pretence. They would ogle at her and ask for Rubina, which was unquestionably suspicious. Gradually as fatigue set in, the family stopped their nightly move. Only Rubina continued shifting to her uncle's home because she was the one considered to be at grave risk. Fateh passed the first night of Naseeb's arrest in vigil with a few family and friends. She mistook every creak for either Naseeb's return or the soldiers.

At dawn, the family left for the police station where Fateh's complaint was again rejected. She was forced to go back to the army camp, where instead of getting any information, her brother was detained. After his release a week later they found his arm had been broken beyond repair during the interrogation. He never regained the use of that arm.

Fateh initially thought that an officer at the police station was acting sympathetically. He told her, 'Do not budge from the gate, and try to talk to whoever enters or leaves the camp, especially the officers. Take all your kids with you, show them your husband is a poor man with many mouths to feed, they might have mercy.' Fateh's illusions about the kindness of that man were soon shattered. 'That was mere play-acting. That police-wallah had ulterior motives; he pretended to be concerned about my children. He said he would provide money for food and books. The army-wallahs tried the same trick. Some pretended that they could get Naseeb released and then they would show up in the night; why did they need to come in the night? They would hang around, demand tea, asking where my daughter was. I would shout at them, I was at the end of my tether, I did not even care for my life. Fearing the worst, my brothers suggested that we revive the earlier practice of staying away from the house during the nights. The soldiers in the meantime were angry that I had filed a case in the high court. Their officer came to give me money saying I would get nothing from the court, but he would help me.'

Not being home at night became a source of harassment for Fateh. The soldiers counter-alleged that Naseeb was a mujahid in hiding and had not disappeared as Fateh claimed. 'You do go to meet him in the night, don't you?' they would say, their words laden with innuendo. 'You should come to us too, you make us walk this far for nothing.'

Days passed into months. Fateh continued her search while others moved on with their lives. Naseeb passed into lore as a *geab gomut*, a disappeared man, one more in the litany of vanished names. In the early years, Fateh kept up her struggle on all fronts to find Naseeb. She filed a case in the high court, in the SHRC, and became a member of the APDP. The years of search yielded nothing.

With Naseeb's disappearance Fateh would wake up with a strange dread. 'My eyes open and I find myself drenched in sweat. Every sound makes me squirm, I feel as if people are bringing his dead body, or sometimes I think it might be him entering the house.' Fateh raised her children on the hope that Naseeb was alive and would return. Zaina would often dream of her father coming back, even though she was too little to remember how he looked. Fateh took these dreams seriously. After every such dream she would visit Baba, who would ask her to donate *tahri*, an offering of turmeric rice for Naseeb's safe return.

Sometimes Fateh would brood over the fact that Naseeb could be dead. 'Would he not try to reach out to his children even once, if he was alive somewhere?' she would question no in particular. 'He loved Zaina so much; he would hold her in her lap as if she was our first child. How could he live without knowing what was happening to his children? He was a loving man; he could never go on without letting his children know he was alive.' Fateh's dilemmas often became long monologues. Whoever sat close would have nothing to offer except a ear and a smile that had nothing to do with happiness.

Desolation

Fateh Jaan's predicament is not unique in today's Kashmir. Since the onset of the armed struggle for the independence of Kashmir in 1989,³ around 70,000 Kashmiris (mostly men) have been killed. An independent survey⁴ reveals there are over 32,000 widows and more than 97,000 orphans in Kashmir. There are between 8,000 and 10,000 cases of custodial disappearances. Amongst the men who disappeared in custody, 2,500 were known to be married. Their spouses, the half-widows have become a marginalised group in society. It is rare for half-widows to remarry and most remain hopeful that their husbands will return one day. According to a

study only 8 per cent of half-widows have remarried or intend to remarry while 91 per cent like Fateh Jaan have not remarried.

Most women from affected households have assumed the task of caring for families and have organised like the APDP to search for those who have disappeared in custody. The disappeared men are often the main or only income providers in their households, solely responsible for financially supporting wives, children, and frequently parents. After disappearances, the financial situation of the family, especially of the half-widows, becomes very dire. Their children suffer the most. According to an Amnesty report (1999), children of the disappeared have become 'half-orphans' and they face psychiatric problems. As per a study conducted at the University of Kashmir, the number of orphans dropping out from schools in rural and urban areas has significantly increased. These children are often pushed into becoming child labourers in automobile workshops, homes, farms, carpet weaving shops etc.

Due to mounting expenses, Fateh had to stop to Hanief and Rubina's education. Both of them began to work as labourers. On some days, when Hanief would fail to find a job, he'd return home despondent and angry. He'd be listless and get into fights. Rubina, on her part, would try to look for work nearby, for she was also responsible for watching over her siblings when Fateh was out working. The younger children attended a government school but without proper nourishment and clothes Fateh found it hard to keep them motivated. Her meagre income was not enough even for basic necessities.

It was in a fit of desperation that Fateh applied for the government's social welfare plan for widows. Being a half-widow, whose husband had disappeared and was not 'dead', she found that she was not eligible. In order to receive authorisation for the welfare plan, Fateh needed to become a 'full' widow, which meant she had to get Naseeb's death certificate. This would confirm her as a widow 'legally'. As per Indian statutes, any married man who has disappeared for seven years or more can be officially considered dead.⁵ After months of intense wrangling with the clerks and officers over every little piece of document, tiny bribes, endless referrals and recommendations, Fateh got the death certificate. She 'officially' became a widow and could now apply for a small remuneration.

For days after she got the document, Fateh pondered, ‘I do not know whether to celebrate getting the certificate or mourn Naseeb’s *kagzi mauth*.⁶ I am a widow now, should I be happy? How can I not believe that Naseeb is alive somewhere? I did not see his dead body, how can he be dead, how can I be a widow?’ She would then assure herself by saying, ‘What will a document do? It does not mean he is dead, it is only to help the family.’ This assurance however would not comfort her for long. ‘It seems I have sold Naseeb for money.’ Fateh felt guilty. ‘What can I do? I am desperate, I know I opened my palms before the authorities who were accomplices, and made Naseeb disappear.’

This wasn’t the first time that Fateh was consumed by remorse. Some years earlier, well-wishers had persuaded Fateh to apply for the ex-gratia relief programme which the government had for victim families whose members had disappeared or had been killed. Fateh abandoned the case, not only because she required a lot of time and money to pursue it, but also because she felt guilty about getting money for Naseeb’s disappearance. ‘It would be like selling him, I want justice not relief, I want to know what happened to him, not take money to shut up.’

Fateh abandoned the case she had filed in the high court. She was unable to spare money for trips to the city and there was no one to watch the children. Fateh hoped that once Hanief found a stable job she would be able to revive the case, but she remained sceptical about getting justice. Fateh won a favourable judgment in the case she had filed against the army with the SHRC. The case had drawn out, and she was brutally cross examined by the defence. ‘I stood by my words, even when they tried to force me into saying incorrect things,’ said Fateh. She did not recant any statement despite threats she received from the army personnel. She identified the army regiment as well as the officer who was the main culprit behind her husband’s disappearance. The SHRC judgment confirmed that the Naseeb had been picked up by the Indian ‘security forces’ – an oxymoronic term if ever there was one.

Fateh’s case joined other cases which proved that enforced disappearances were a matter of policy, a part of the counter-insurgency techniques used rampantly by the Indian army in Kashmir. The SHRC statement borrowing from a Supreme Court judgment stated that they were ‘mindful of what is frequently happening during these days. Persons are kidnapped in the sight of others and forcibly taken out of sight of all others

and later kidnapped or killed.’ However, on the question of punishment to the army men who arrested Naseeb, the SHRC remained silent, and resorted to only mildly chastising those involved through the Supreme Court judgment. It referred to the army’s behaviour as tantamount to a ‘cover-up’ and recommended compensation for Fateh Jaan. This judgment came in the year 2008. Fateh Jaan failed to receive any compensation or any other form of relief, nor did she have any interest in pursuing the matter. What came instead was an offer of a huge sum from the army, urging her to take back her case in exchange. Fateh refused.

Winter 2011

After getting the death certificate, Fateh suffered from episodes of deep depression. ‘Naseeb will not come now. It seems to me he was killed twice, first by the soldiers, now by this document. What could I do, I have kids to feed, I do not want the younger ones to stop school too,’ Fateh mumbled as she lay on a ragged quilt, shivering. It was early winter, and the worst cold in 16 years was descending on Kashmir. Fateh’s house was freezing. In summer the entire family had pitched in to layer the ceiling with mud to create insulation against the cold. Apparently it did not work; the ceiling was flaking and a cold wave seeped into the house. Fateh lay sick throughout winter while Rubina took care of the entire household.

‘*Bey-raham*, merciless,’ she called the entire official procedure when she gradually began recovering towards mid-summer. Also, she had not received any monetary assistance because some more paperwork was required. Fateh just did not care to pursue the case further. ‘We will work harder, I do not need relief, let us see what happens,’ Fateh said with renewed hope.

On 11 June 2012, which was the 10th anniversary of Naseeb’s disappearance, at Baba’s behest, Fateh cooked tahri. Young Zaina, Ayman and Rubina spent most of that hot day of June talking about ‘Papa’s return’. Hanief was excited and tried showing me ‘Papa’s certificate’, which he prodded out from the ceiling where it had been kept in a plastic bag. The girls sat close, wishing to see ‘*Papa ki certificate*’, their father’s document, the decree of his death. They most likely did not grasp what the document stood for. They touched the pale sheet of paper gingerly, running their

fingers over the government of Jammu and Kashmir insignia with ‘*certificate-e-maut*’ emblazoned on top – the two words an awkward amalgam of English and Urdu – ‘death certificate’. A plate of yellow rice and chicken sprinkled with sea salt and fried onions sat in the middle of the gathering, an offering for Naseeb’s safe return – someday. Fateh urged me to eat and take some home.

The thin line that separates the real and the false seemed blurry as Fateh put a fistful in a tiny plastic bag and shoved it in my carrier. All I could hear were her loud supplications for Naseeb’s return, while she chided the children, ordering them to keep the certificate back safely, and run out to distribute the rice to passers-by.

(The names have not been changed. The ‘security’ and ‘privacy’ of those concerned cannot be jeopardised in a land where nobody is safe, and no one is granted privacy.)

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- 1 We Have Got His Death Certificate, Now Pray That He Is Alive
 - 2 Hazrat Hajar, mother of Prophet Ibrahim’s son Ismail, ran between the two hillocks named Safa and Marwa in search of help or water.
 - 3 ‘Dead But Not Forgotten, Survey on People Killed Since 1989-2006 in Baramulla District of Jammu Kashmir’, *Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society*, 2006.
 - 4 Ahmed, Dabla Naseeb, *A Survey of Widows and Orphans in Kashmir Conflict* (India: Department of Sociology, Kashmir University, 2007).
 - 5 Islamic scholars in Kashmir have reduced the number of years to four.
 - 6 A rough translation means a death proven on paper (literal: paper-death).

PaK: Ethnicity, Democracy and Islam



Mazhar Iqbal

The successive governments in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir (PaK), have cleverly manipulated the media to publicise stories of good governance, democratic success and people's unflinching allegiance to a particular branch of Islamic faith. But the fundamental issues related to Pakistan's xenophobic and authoritarian attempts at controlling people's political and civil rights, and the weaknesses of a socio-political system which is based on religious dogma have never been openly addressed.

There are a number of stories, myths and legendary statements about ethnic diversity, religious harmony, ideal political and social situations, democratic successes and a peaceful and harmonious balance of power between the ruled and the ruler in PaK.

How Pakistan Controls Kashmiris

It is stated that PaK is not officially administered by Pakistan. But in reality, both territories of PaK, the Gilgit-Baltistan region and the areas between the districts of Neelum and Bhimber, are officially, administratively and manipulatively controlled by Pakistan. Though they are not formally regarded as being part of Pakistani territory, and the political, judicial and administrative systems adopted by these territories are labelled as being independent and separate from other federating units of Pakistan, the strategic influence of the federal Pakistani government is evident everywhere in the affairs of the state.

Prior to August 2000, all Pakistani provinces were made up of administrative units called divisions, and these were further subdivided into districts as the fourth level of government. In August 2000, divisions were

abolished as an administrative tier, and the provinces are now directly divided into districts. But in PaK, in order to ensure stricter control, the second tier of government is formed by just two administrative divisions with a third tier of districts.

According to the 1998 census, the population of only one district of Pakistan (Lahore) was 6,318,745. Interestingly, the population of the whole of PaK (excluding Gilgit-Baltistan) in 2008 was 4,567,982 (estimated) and there were 10 district governments to control this population. If area is the main consideration for administrative control then the total land area of districts like Chaghi, Kharan and Khuzdar in Baluchistan is three times larger than all 10 districts in PaK. So why is Chaghi, measuring more than 50,000 kilometres, not further subdivided into 10 or 12 districts? The reason is obvious: The population density in Chaghi is only 4 people per kilometre.

In fact, the federal government not only exercises significant control over the structure of government, and the appointment of judges, top bureaucrats and other functionaries, but also effectively creates sectarian, political and ethnic differences – and it is all done under a legal cover. The most influential bodies like the Kashmir Council and the Gilgit-Baltistan Council are composed of both federal officials and members of the local assemblies and headed by the prime minister of Pakistan.

**Table 1: Districts and Tehsils of PaK
(Jammu and Kashmir Region)**

Districts	Names of Tehsils
Muzaffarabad	Muzaffarabad, Naseerabad (Paticka)
Hattian	Hattian Balla, Chikar, Leepa
Neelum	Athmaqam, Sharda
Bagh	Bagh, Dhirkot, Hari Gehl
Haveli	Haveli (Kahutta), Khurshidabad
Poonch	Rawalakot, Thorar, Hajira, Abbaspur
Kotli	Kotli, Khoiratta, Fatehpur Charhoi, Sehnsa
Mirpur	Mirpur, Dadyal
Bhimber	Bhimber, Samahni, Bernala
Sudhnoti	Pallandri, Mong, Tararkhel, Baluch

Source: Government of Gilgit-Baltistan, Gilgit official website

Table 2: Districts and Major Populated Areas of PaK (Gilgit-Baltistan Region)

Districts	Major Populated Areas
Ghanche	Khaplu, Balghar, Keris, Doghani, Siksa, Hassanabad, Thaghas, Ghuwari
Skardu	Skardu, Shigar Khas, Mehdi Abad, Sermik, Stak, Gulab Pur, Kharmang Khas, Kachura
Gilgit	Gilgit, Naltar, Nagar State Hunza, Gojal (Upper Hunza), Shimshal
Diamir	Chilas, Darel/Tangir
Ghizar	Gahkuch, Gulapur, Singul, Ishkoman, Yasin
Astore	Gorikot, Tarashing, Rupal, Rama Lake
Hunza-Nagar	Karimabad, Aliabad, Sikandarabad

Source: Government of Gilgit-Baltistan, Gilgit official website

There is widespread misconception that the part of Jammu and Kashmir state, which is under the control of Pakistan, is now free and liberated from ‘foreign’ rule. This claim is supported by references to the Interim Constitution Act of 1974 (the document in accordance with which PaK is governed), and the arrangements made under this legal framework. One often hears the boast that the Interim Constitution gives wide-ranging powers to the people of this region. But in reality, the federal government of Pakistan is empowered to supersede laws passed by the assemblies of these areas and its decisions are not subject to judicial review, even by the superior courts of the country. This Act has been strongly rejected by Kashmiri leaders in a recent meeting with Pakistan’s minister of Kashmir affairs in Islamabad. This, even though all those who attended that meeting were handpicked and already in the good books of Islamabad. They declared that the Act, in its present shape, was not acceptable to them.

Pakistan has always boasted about the success of its democratic institutions, the efficacy of its administrative system and the continuity of

democratic governments in PaK. Yet, the picture on the ground shows the colours to be less bright than they seem from a distance, and the democratic face reveals itself as one that is painted.

Tales of Democratic Success and the Interim Act 1974

One of the tales used as an example of the success of democracy in PaK has to do with the continuity of elections. In 2011, Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan's ruling Muslim Conference was almost wiped out in an election exercise. Until then, this party was considered unbreakable and unbeatable due to its so-called role in the fight for freedom against the Hindu rulers. Those who do not have a close eye on the politics of this region viewed the change as just one more gimmick in the continuous chain of tricks that Pakistan has been playing since the beginning.

In just the Jammu and Kashmir region alone, there are more than 25 political parties, including local branches of mainstream Pakistani political parties who regularly participate in the elections. This democratic process is in place to show a smooth running of affairs. However, no political party that openly advocates independence for Jammu and Kashmir or any political view challenging Kashmir's accession to Pakistan, can participate in elections.

In this regard, the Interim Act of 1974 says that 'no person or political party in Azad Jammu and Kashmir shall be permitted to propagate against or take part in activities prejudicial or detrimental to the ideology of the state's accession to Pakistan.' Under section 5 (2) (vii) of the Legislative Assembly Election Ordinance 1970, 'a person will be disqualified for propagating any opinion or action in any manner prejudicial to the ideology of Pakistan, the ideology of state's accession to Pakistan, or the sovereignty and integrity of Pakistan.' In other words, without signing a sworn statement of allegiance to Jammu and Kashmir's accession to Pakistan, nobody is allowed to take part in the legislative assembly elections.

Ethnic Divisions in the Electoral Process

Democracy in PaK revolves around major ethnic groups. Though the important powers are always in the hands of federally appointed officials, the election drama is staged to showcase the ‘democratic face’ of the state. Tribal affiliations, ethnic popularity, linkages with elders of an ethnic group, local influences and interventions by the security set-up all play an important role. Who is backed by whom and which candidate is of what tribe? Which tribe has more influence on the powers-that-be? Sometimes, tribal and family ties and clan politics trump all other considerations. Thus, in the absence of any democratic ideal, voters have to stick to clan loyalties and the whole election process becomes a futile exercise.

A few political parties and groups have shown some respect for true democratic objectives. But their performance during the elections is always highly pathetic. A closer look at the numbers of MLAs hailing from different tribes and clans during previous elections presents an interesting picture of the whole democratic process.

Though there is no room for racial or ethnic priorities in true democracies, the figures of the legislative assembly of PaK highlight that certain ethnic groups always dominate in the elections and make their way to be part of the government. These are the Chaudhrys (Gujjars and Jats), the Sudhans and the Rajputs.

The Gujjars are said to be the largest ethnic group and they are scattered all over the state. The Jats are confined only to Mirpur and Kotli districts. The Sudhans or Sardars are mainly in Rawalakot and Sudhnoti districts. Rajputs are also scattered all over the state. Some other smaller ethnic groups like Mughals, Awans, Qureshis, have strong political affiliations but they could never challenge these dominant tribes.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, Pashtuns, Shins, Ladakhi, Balti, Puriki, Wakhi, Yashkun, Tibetan, Mongol, Tatar, Mon, Pashtun, Khowar, Dom, Gujjar, Rajput and Kashmiri are ethnic groups. Shina is the basic language of this region and other languages include Brushaski, Wakhi, Khowar and Balti.

The numbers of MLAs having strong ethnic vote banks and elected on direct assembly seats are given in the table that follows.

Table 3: Composition of Ethnic Groups in Legislative Assembly of PaK

LA Session	Chaudhrys	Sudhans	Rajputs
2011-2016	11	07	3
2006-2011	10	08	06
2001-2006	10	09	04
1996-2001	11	10	02
1991-1996	08	13	08
1990-1991	12	10	03
1985-1990	11	14	04
1975-1977	11	05	04
1971-1975	05	04	03

Source: PaK Legislative Assembly, Muzaffarabad

Shackled Political Freedom

Clan loyalties do not come to the fore as much in public expression of freedom of thought as they do in electoral politics. As far as the political views of people about the future of Jammu and Kashmir are concerned, they do not conform to clan politics or a collective opinion. People are divided into two broad groupings – the pro-Pakistan people, who favour accession to Pakistan, and the pro-independence people who favour secession from both India and Pakistan. It has been observed that the ‘pro-Pakistan’ people routinely and enthusiastically back the armed struggle against India and never hesitate to speak against the Indian government, politicians and army. They openly participate in meetings, programmes and other activities and feel free to join any Pakistani forum, either political or social. They also like to make Pakistani friends and boast about their relations with their contacts in Pakistan’s major political, bureaucratic, military and social circles. Most of the educated persons in Pakistani Kashmir have friends in Pakistani communities, religious groups, social and political organisations and in the Pakistani business sector.

More than a few politicians have relatives in the Pakistani security establishment and intelligence set-up and they tend to seek their active support as and when they need it. The commanders of the Pakistani military formations responsible for the Pakistani Kashmir region are considered the real bosses, the ones who run the affairs of the state. Political parties such as Sardar Qayyum's Muslim Conference are considered the political face of the Pakistani army in PaK.

In the past, the strongest supporter of the idea of accession to Pakistan was the Muslim Conference. During his son, Sardar Attique Khan's last tenure in government, the Muslim Conference had to face serious infighting, resulting in its bifurcation. Now the Nawaz Sharif backed Muslim League is the strongest political group that supports Kashmir's accession to Pakistan. This party has supporters in almost all districts in Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan regions. However, the support for accession is not the only reason for people to stay in this party; there are many other compelling factors, including tribal associations, ethnic biases and socio-economic trends. For example, Nawaz Sharif's party is in power in the Punjab province which is geographically much closer to the Jammu and Kashmir region than any other part of Pakistan. The people of Gujranwala, Gujrat, Sialkot, Rawalpindi, Abbotabad, Jehlum and Murree share a mix of customs and traditions, culture, religious functions, agricultural practices and business ties with the people of Mirpur, Bhimber, Kotli, Pallandari, Rawalakot, Bagh, and Muzaffarabad districts in PaK.

Abdul Razzaque is a Kashmiri IT student. He is a strong supporter of Kashmir's accession to Pakistan. He says: 'Even if we hold a plebiscite today, Kashmiris would prefer Pakistan over India because it (India) is a military power occupying Kashmir with its 6,00,000 troops to suppress Kashmiris, whereas Pakistan is the greatest ambassador of the Kashmir cause in the international forum.'

Such political freedom is not available to those people who have different political views. A person who believes that the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India is the ultimate solution of the problem cannot speak publicly. He may face intimidation, harassment or at the very least, social stigma. Equally, for those who have been speaking up in favour of liberation from both India and Pakistan, life has been difficult.

Muslim Identity vs Ethnic Character

Though the majority of the people of PaK are Muslim, they tend to introduce themselves as members of a particular social or ethnic group. They like to be called by their family names instead of their given names. Raja Saab, Sardar Saab, Chaudhry Saab etc are the most common spoken names amongst the locals. Islam is the dominant religion in this part of the world, but as symbols of identity, Islamic faith and religious affiliations are not as powerful as ethnic background and social standing.

The population of PaK is comprised of diverse tribal groups and they are culturally and linguistically different from the Kashmiris of the Indian part of the state. Their cultural practices, customs and traditions, dress codes, ceremonies at marriages and deaths are similar to those of the people of the adjoining districts of mainland Pakistan.

Language is also a major player in social dynamics. People in Mirpur, Bhimber and Kotli districts speak local dialects of Punjabi and local culture is predominantly similar to Gujrat, Gujrawanwala, Jhelum and Chakwal. People in Rawalakot, Sudhnoti and Bagh speak Pahari and other local dialects and their cultural linkages are with the people of Kahuta, Rawalpindi, Murree and Jhelum districts in Punjab.

The inhabitants of the upper parts of the Kashmir region, including Muzaffarabad, Neelum and adjoining areas, have similarities to the people of Abbotabad, Mansehra and Balakot districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. The people of this region like praise, and sometimes cross all limits in praising their favourite personalities. Local Urdu newspapers in PaK, and expatriate Kashmiri communities in Europe, Great Britain, USA, Canada and Gulf countries are microcosms of petty interests and blind loyalties to greedy local politicians.

Sudhans, Mughals and Rajputs in Power Politics

In the past, Sudhans, Mughals and Rajputs have been in the forefront of affairs in PaK. However, most recently, Mirpuri Jats and Gujjars hailing from the southern districts of Kotli, Mirpur and Bhimber have gained prominence in government, politics and businesses. Mirpuri Kashmiris in Great Britain have been struggling for the last few years to assert

themselves as distinct from other immigrants from Pakistan. They have gained prominence in local parliamentary and council election in a few major cities in the UK.

In almost all significant cities and towns of PaK, local politicians, religious seminaries and government officials are doing the same business, but in different guises, with the approvals and blessings of the Pakistani army and other state secret agencies.

Nationalists Gaining Popularity

The nationalist elements have gained popularity in recent years. They have been actively involved in highlighting human rights abuses and restrictions on civil liberties. In the past, they have been defensive and on their guard against the federal government's highly authoritative rule, but now they are much more forceful and outspoken. Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (different groups), Kashmir National Party, Jammu and Kashmir National Awami Party and the United Kashmir People's National Party (UKPNP) are prominent among the nationalist elements.

Despite the fact that the majority of the supporters of Independent Kashmir hail from areas which come under Pakistani control, Kashmiri nationalistic expression has gained much more popularity in European states than in PaK itself. Perhaps the hegemonic and authoritarian policies of the Pakistani government are responsible for this. These groups feel that Pakistan has not only curtailed their interests, but also exploited the region's resources and their hard-earned money.

UKPNP is one of these groups that has recently been active in PaK and abroad. This group is led by Switzerland-based nationalist leader Shaukat Kashmiri, and has supporters in the UK, Europe, America and Gulf countries.

Extra-Judicial Killings, Arrests and Disappearances

Those who have a difference of opinion with the official position are considered troublemakers. They have to face arrests and disappearances, financial losses, fake criminal cases in courts and in some cases, extra-judicial killings.

Innocent people are forced to join with fundamentalist organisations. In the autumn of 2011, the residents of Neelum Valley complained about renewed guerrilla activity in their area. This border district has been used as the staging post for guerrillas entering Jammu and Kashmir right since the 1990s.

A local civil society organisation, Press for Peace (PFP) claimed that a large number of women protested against the activities of some banned guerrilla groups in the Neelum Valley. According to the PFP, the women also approached the Pakistani army in Athmuqam – the district headquarters of Neelum Valley – and urged the officers to stop the ‘militants’ from crossing into the Indian side of Kashmir. Their main fear was that guerrilla activity in their area would once again adversely affect the relative peace that had held on both sides of the LoC since the 2003 ceasefire. With memories of regular crossfire along the LoC still fresh, their fear was that the presence of guerrilla organisations in the area would adversely affect their lives.

Plight of Kashmiri Refugees

In PaK, the migrants from Indian parts of the state live in camps. Since Pakistan has never recognised Indian control over any part of Kashmir, these refugees coming from the Indian side are classified as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). This contradictory approach has increased the problems of those who are already in a pathetic situation. Not being considered refugees creates hurdles in their rehabilitation and resettlement, and the United Nations bodies who look after international refugees have not been approached to take care of these migrants.

IDPs from elsewhere in Pakistan can be settled in any part of PaK. Those from Swat and other frontier regions of Pakistan, as also refugees from Afghanistan, have been accommodated not only in Muzaffarabad but also in other districts. They are allowed to work. But Kashmiri refugee families have been compelled to live only in camps in and around

Muzaffarabad, and they are not officially allowed to live elsewhere in Pakistan.

Afghan refugees in Pakistan have been taken under the umbrella of international refugee monitoring agencies, thus guaranteeing their basic human rights. However, no international protection has been provided to those who have migrated from the Indian side.

Conclusion

A beleaguered democratic process, complex ethnic composition, and Islamic faith are three distinct but closely woven threads of the socio-political fabric of PaK. Pakistan controls this region through a policy of favouritism, division, mistrust and confusion. The theory of accession to Pakistan is the mother of all loyalties. Those who adhere to this theory are granted prominence, acceptance and reward; those who differ are considered potentially dangerous and ultimately dealt with using an iron hand. The outer world sees a democratic set-up with administrative and civil powers, independent judiciary, and a vibrant civil society. But for the people living in PaK it is just a totalitarian democracy.

Looking Back at the Roots



Siddhartha Gigoo

To imagine Kashmir happy is, as Albert Camus says, to ‘imagine Sisyphus happy’.¹ Even the gods didn’t know what it was to be Sisyphus – the king who reconciled to his fate and accepted the mundane ordeal he was burdened with. Struggle inevitably became a way of life for Sisyphus. It became the only essence of his existence.

Then there are those who don’t even know Sisyphus and his torment. They don’t know of this kind of existence – for they don’t know what it is to have lived through horror, when the thin line separating the moral from the immoral dissolves into a horrid darkness.

For the people of Kashmir who laboured through the dark times of the late 80s and 90s, ‘being Sisyphus’ has come to be an essential attitude. The survivors – men, women and children – continue to go on with their lives, listening to the din and tolerating adversities inflicted on them by the creators, protectors and custodians of human dignity and freedom. The only choice they have is no choice – that is, to go on living with despair.

In the absence of free will, one sometimes is driven towards transforming one’s misfortunes into some sort of a passion – to live and conquer fears. When one is face to face with danger, one lives. When the only certainty is uncertainty, one lives. When one is unsure of everything, one lives.

For the people living in Kashmir, wretchedness is a passion. For the displaced Pandits, exile aspires to become a passion. For these estranged people seeking even redemption is futile. Yet they endeavour to salvage what is left of their existence which to outsiders may seem meagre. They get outraged when they read of strangers writing about them, analysing their predicament and making proclamations about their desires and expectations. And yet, paradoxically, they believe in the infallibility of man.

Having lived in the Valley through the most tumultuous times of the 90s, I have come to disregard the worth of the analytical essays about Kashmir and the Kashmiris produced by armchair intellectuals and talk-show enthusiasts. What do these analysts and talk-show frequenters know about fear? What do they know about love turning into bitterness? What do they know about passion? Or what it is to live in stifling circumstances and be able to narrate a tale not just of survival but of the will to rise even in the face of human atrophy? They fight over words, let semantics and polemics take over the imagination and snatch from us our consciousness of a shared horror which has caused, among other things, obliteration and deprivation on a large scale – at social, psychological, moral, spiritual and metaphysical levels.

The people of Kashmir were made to love one another, then suspect one another, then hate one another, then betray one another and now to reconcile with one another's misfortunes.

Whatever is written about Kashmir and its oppressed people sells globally. Ironically, it sells in Kashmir too. Some read the writings to remind themselves that the 'theatre of the absurd' is not dead. The plays of Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett have been and will be enacted for years. *Waiting for Godot* is not absurd in a place where absurdity is a way of life. It is unique in its ordinariness. What is so farcical about waiting, anyway?

1989: Act I, Scene I

Tourist: What are you doing at the door?

Man: Waiting.

Tourist: For whom? For what?

Man: How does it matter, anyway?

Tourist: How long will you wait?

Man: Till I am fed up with waiting.

Tourist: What are you living for, Mister?

Silence

1995: Act I, Scene II

Tourist: What are you doing at the door?

Man: Waiting.

Tourist: For whom? For what?

Man: How does it matter, anyway?

Tourist: How long will you wait?

Man: Till I am fed up with waiting.

Tourist: What are you living for, Mister?

Silence

2012: Act I, Scene V

Tourist: What are you doing at the door?

Migrant: Waiting.

Tourist: For whom? For what?

Migrant: How does it matter, anyway?

Tourist: How long will you wait?

Migrant: Till I can wait no more.

Tourist: I heard it came and went, whatever you are waiting for.

Migrant: Has the waiting ended?

Silence

It is this waiting that has shaped our being. We have been made to wait and think that we have lost something, that much has been snatched away from us and that precious thing will be returned to us. We pine for lost time. This waiting is good. It has made us live another day and given our lives a meaning.

We played with danger those days. Our lives were fraught with perils. As kids, we saw all sorts of things for the first time. We saw strangers, suspicious eyes, silent departures, deserted streets, houses and localities. The tragedy that befalls us is that as witnesses to those troubled and horrific

times, we tend to forget the moral imperatives which guide our existence. The only thing which matters to us is deriving vicious pleasure in scoring points over ideological and sectarian lines. Genet once said to the rioting students of Paris: 'My superiority over you is that I am uneducated'. He went on to announce to the homeless and exiled Palestinian refugees: 'I am with you so long as you don't have a home. The moment you have a home I will no longer be on your side.'²

The displaced Pandits, without whom Kashmir once was incomplete (and perhaps still is), seem to have moved on. The Muslims feel betrayed by those who promised them deliverance. The vows that once were made to them have become hollow words and remain buried in old and discarded historical documents. The present day migrant children are neither Kashmiri nor Pandits. Superficial rituals have taken over and destroyed the 'exile consciousness' which, for real cultural, philosophical and spiritual import, must involve preservation of not dead and meaningless rites but of memory and consciousness through the arts and literature – much like the way Jews and the Palestinians have gone about preserving their moorings and identity. The expression of the Kashmiri Pandit identity in various forms of writing is revivalist in nature and seeks solace in the celebration of rituals and practices which to me neither make any sense in real cultural terms nor augment this exile consciousness.

The questions that haunt me are: Who am I? Where have I come from? What will become of me?

The old Pandit generation is fading away. The young are losing the memory of their own ancestry and lineage. Have they been able to memorialise aspects of this shrinking identity and a litany of losses through the arts and literature? No. Haunted by a sense of extinction, I shiver when I come across people who seek to assess and weigh losses and assign degrees to suffering without even knowing what they lost.

If we choose to do something about the passing away of the past, then we need to change the way we live and the way we teach our children how they must live. Generations from now, our children and children of our children may not read newspaper archives or history books. They might want to listen to grandma stories at bedtime. What stories will we tell them? Who will tell them the stories? Who will remember? How will we remember?

The migrant community, the community I belong to, has assimilated into the hazy ‘cultural nationalism’ of a diverse and complex nation. The future generations, who will no longer be ‘displaced’ entities, will bear the burden of a borrowed memory or remnants of ancestral memory. Sebald, talking of German emigrants to England and the United States, says: ‘And the last remnants memory destroys.’³

We shall only trace our roots and pine and long for a lost homeland to which we may not return for we are not homeless any more. We stand silenced and forgotten.

I shall recount an anecdote: Last autumn, I was invited to attend a function in a convention centre in New Delhi. It was about ‘Exodus and Exile’. At first, I refused politely. I invented an excuse that I had other important preoccupations. But the truth was that I had no pressing engagements. I was not doing anything of importance at all, except attending to the usual things of life. And if there was nothing worthwhile to do I would reminisce about the childhood days or my youth.

But then, as an afterthought, I changed my mind and dragged myself to the function. A section of displaced Pandit migrants was revisiting the roots and commemorating some prominent members on their achievements in their respective fields such as sciences, education, social work, business and even entrepreneurship. I came across an old, ailing man who had come to attend this community event of the exiled people. He was not able to walk on his own and, therefore, carried with him a walking stick which he used for support. Unable to pace up and down the big hall where the attendees were assembling and talking, he resigned himself to sitting in a chair.

The stage was set. I realised that I’d arrived early in order to make my presence felt so that, if the need arose, I could leave early. I leafed through the brochure giving details of the programme and roamed in the aisle, greeting some familiar men and women and even strangers who, like me, had arrived early as well. I saw not more than 50 people in the hall. Most of them were old. Two men were frolicking around and attending to the arrangements, the flowers, the bouquets, the garlands, the tables, the chairs and the microphone. The function was to begin at 10 am. I looked at my mobile phone. (I don’t wear a watch.) It was 11 am. Some people said that the organisers were waiting for the chief guest – a politician.

An hour went by. The chief guest arrived along with the retinue. She and other accompanying dignitaries were ushered into a room full of

artefacts and antiques from the old times. I peeked and saw clothes, utensils, shoes, books, spectacles, and other assorted items. Some of the things looked new, while a few looked aged, though they shone on account of having been polished. Some objects like a woman's headdress, a bridal dress, a samovar and a pair of clogs had been created and crafted anew. It was a beautiful collection. Such things, which exist in some households, are kept in trunks or on display on shelves where they make good decorations. In either case they are relegated to a life in boxes.

The organisers asked the attendees to enter the room and look at the things. Some people started to explain the relevance of these relics to the chief guest, who struggled to retain a smile on her face and nodded intermittently in artificial appreciation. There was a hint of boredom in the expressions she betrayed. The other officials who accompanied her seemed to be genuinely interested in this small makeshift museum of cultural heritage of the exiled people that had been erected in the morning and was destined to be demolished that evening once the event was over. The organisers, it seemed to me, were busy in making sure that the chief guest acknowledged the efforts of the community to preserve what was fast on the brink of extinction. I saw an affectation of calm reign when the chief guest blurted something which was barely audible to the people around. Something about 5,000 years of history. Something about revival. She repeated someone else's words. She had memorised the introduction from the brochure.

I smiled mischievously when the elderly man sitting next to me protested, 'Why should I go into the room to see these things?'

'Why not?' said someone. 'This is our culture. This is what we have lost.'

The elderly man kept quiet.

I asked an acquaintance of mine, a journalist, why there were no children and youngsters around. Someone overheard me and whispered, 'The children and the youth have no business here. They had better attend to their education and careers. Don't spoil them. They have a life and a future. What good is the past for them?'

It somehow didn't occur to me that it was Friday – a working day. The only people sitting in the chairs in front of the dais were old retirees who had nothing else to do in their 'old age homes' which they guard when their children are out in the world. They needed such occasions to wear neckties

and suits and socialise and talk about how life was in their homeland – Kashmir.

The old men sipped *kehva* while their drivers waited for them in the parking lot. ‘It is better to have marriage ceremonies in Jammu. We can have it like the way we used to in Kashmir. Spread over a week! The quality of the mutton is better there,’ someone said.

The sluggish day progressed. A speaker started speaking about medieval Kashmir and the history of Pandits through various eras. All I saw was yawns. The old man with the staff sat next to me. We started talking. I talked of the makeshift museum which the organisers had set up. He thought that I was mocking the way the function progressed. He said, ‘Son, the things which mattered were not salvaged. We abandoned them. The real item that should be displayed is an old man like me. The untold stories frozen in my heart and my disjointed memory are far more precious than these shoes and spectacles placed on the shelves. These people don’t realise that they are preserving junk.’

The man went on: ‘You know, when I left my house in Kashmir in 1990 and reached the Banihal tunnel, the terrified and bewildered people said, “Thank God, we are in India.” We were leaving behind a land which was becoming Pakistan. My shadow, which fell on the road that day, was strewn across a border of sorts. Half of it was in Pakistan and half in India. I changed the time in my wrist watch and pretended to be fearless. And now these people talk of exile. What exile? Exile has ended. I shall be cremated here by my sons who are not migrants. They hate being called migrants and homeless.’

The man paused for a moment, sighed and then resumed: ‘Home is neither here nor there. It can be anywhere. One just needs to be alive. But sometimes my thoughts wander and take me to my uncle’s house where I spent some glorious days. No one knows if it still exists. It was in shambles even those days and was about to fall apart like a pack of cards and turn to dust....’

As evening fell, I sauntered out of the place quietly. The autumn sun was gentle. I whistled an old film song and got into an auto-rickshaw towards my home. That night, I watched a raging debate on television and remembered the parting lament of the old man I had met. ‘I am the last man in exile now. There will be no more exile hereafter. Yet I shall remain.’

As I recount this experience, I struggle to make sense of my own understanding of the torment, the horror and exile consciousness. I see a bizarre and unsettling thirst for cultivating dejection. And as in the case of the Stockholm Syndrome, I realise that one empathises with one's masked tormentor and even begins to see the humanity behind the very torment he inflicts upon the victim – the tormentor's desire to keep the victim alive for one more day. I see that in our pain, lies our redemption.

Is it this hope that one embraces? Or is it profound hopelessness that shepherds one to go on, relentlessly, rejecting the world with its fallibility? As men and women of troubled lands we have gone through tough battles of the heart and the soul and braved hardships and eventually endured and prevailed, dreaming of valour and triumph all along the tumultuous odysseys. Even if the world puts us to an endless trial and pronounces judgments that seek to silence us and curb our individual liberties, we refuse to falter and with unwavering passion and zest we seek opportunities for exaltation. There is sublime humanity in man's ability to stand before the face of torment, look into the very depths of the darkness and stand with forbearance and not fall. It is this conquest of fear and human weakness that makes us strong. In such acts we become insurmountable and unconquerable. It is this liberty of our spirit which shall make us stand tall.

The lone spirit is indomitable and comes to embody the supreme will to outlive all things impermanent. Faulkner's man 'will not merely endure but will prevail even when the last dingdong of doom has faded. The puny inexhaustible voice will remain.'⁴ And the brave and virtuous voice of such a man will be the bearer of the only truth the rest of the people will ever need to listen to.

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2 Edmund White's introduction to Jean Genet's *Prisoner of Love*, translated by Barbara Bray (UK: Pan Books, 1990).

3 Sebald, W G, *The Emigrants*, translated by Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 1996), p 1.

4 'William Faulkner's Banquet Speech', in Nobelprize.org, 10 December 1950 <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1949/faulkner-speech.html> [accessed 12 February 2013].

Kashmir: A Colony of India



Fahad Shah

There are always two ways of looking at a situation – optimistic and pessimistic. In a place where the line between these two orientations is blurred, strictly aligning with either position is difficult. This is especially so in Kashmir – one of the most militarised zones on earth with more than 6,00,000 Indian troops and around 1,00,000 policemen. There are so many lines between the lines that making a rational choice is riddled in complexity. In the meantime, the truth gets killed and pseudo-narratives, rich in propaganda, are offered to the masses.

Masses have the power to establish change, not individuals. Every year on 30 August, the world observes a day for people who have been made to disappear, mostly in conflict-stricken regions. It is a day that recognises the violation of their basic human rights and is referred to as International Day of the Disappeared. When talking about human rights violations in any form, one cannot help but talk about Kashmir. There are around 8,000-10,000 persons in Kashmir who are missing involuntarily, a fact that has been confirmed by human rights watchdogs like Amnesty International. In most of the cases, Indian forces or the local police or counter-insurgent men have taken civilians away and they have never returned home ever since.¹

On 30 August 2012, I was in Delhi, the capital of India, and I knew that in a public park in Srinagar, the families of those who had disappeared were going to assemble to make their voices heard. Their cries had been falling on deaf ears for decades.

In the evening I received two emails in quick succession. One email contained a photo feature of the gathering at the park and the other was from the Disaster Management Cell (DMC) of the state government, led by a chief minister who welcomes India's approval of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the retail market.

Every picture from the park spoke of forgotten tragedies. There were women seated, holding placards and large framed photos of their husbands or sons, surrounded by crowds who had arrived to show solidarity. It was for the first time in the history of the Kashmir conflict that young artists – resistance artists – joined the peaceful sit-in and fashioned artworks about the day and its significance. Every painting had a story to tell. One creation comprised of sheets of newspapers glued together, with a human shape cut out in the centre, depicting the void left behind by the missing people. Casual onlookers might have found it hard to determine the emotional quality of such art – but for me it was optimistic.

The artists in the park were drawing sketches of so grave a calamity that its after-effects were still quite visible. They were adding to the history of tragedies and dissent. One more day was piled upon to several years of resistance and defiance. One more plea was made for justice. The artists compelled people to come to the park, to respond to the organised crimes against humanity being committed in Kashmir for more than two decades.²

The second email from the government department had pictures of children drawing. The kids didn't know what the day signified, and the organisers of the 'painting competition' didn't want them to be any wiser. Children were sketching images to show 'how best to save people from disasters', mostly natural disasters. Now I am not against disaster awareness, but diffusing knowledge about selective disasters seems only to aid the city pages of local newspapers the next day.

In Kashmir, the emergency services deployed depend on the types of disasters. Natural disasters are looked after by the government, while manmade disasters are taken care of by the victims and the general public. When inhumanely executed manmade tragedies claim more lives than other disasters, priorities change. They must change. What if you leave home in the morning and never return? In Kashmir, we have seen a surge in the number of the victims of such catastrophes.

The Indian forces and the local police, who represent the country here, have brought this disaster onto the people. Around 70,000 civilians have been killed and the number increases every day. They are represented as small mounds on playgrounds and fields. An era of resistance has been buried in this land hastily, even as the forces fear losing illegitimate control. More than 6,000 unmarked graves have been exposed so far, but the government wants us to believe that all the bodies buried in them belong to

militants. If challenged, they urge the relatives of missing persons to locate the graves of their kith and kin, so that the government can exhume the bodies. This is India's Home Ministry at its best – in perpetual denial.³



India's presence in Kashmir has never been constructive in any way. In the late 80s, when an armed rebellion had started for Kashmir's independence, India crushed the uprising with full might. Since then it has continued the reign of repression over civilians, squashing a civil resistance movement that continues till date.

It is not hard to compare the pre-1947 British Raj in India with the post-1947 Indian Raj in Kashmir. Both are identical; one coloniser left and another emerged in South Asia. The occupied became the occupier. Kashmir, indeed, has become a colony of India. India is holding Kashmir by force, and the situation is not any better in other states in the country.

Let's look at the facts around us. Muslim boys are arrested across cities and framed in fake cases. The people of Kudukunalum protest against a nuclear power plant, fearing for their safety, and the state issues arrest warrants.⁴ Adivasis refuse to leave the land they own when the government tries building dams over their homes; they are bullied.⁵

In a speech at Jamia Milia Islamia University in September 2012, writer and activist Arundhati Roy said that there are two types of 'terrorists' that the Indian governments has created – Islamist and Maoist. Most of the wars fought by the Indian forces – which involve killing, torturing, and terrorising civilians – are in the name of vanquishing imagined enemies, or in the name of development.

The government here is affiliated with the 'Indian Denial Factory'. The Factory likes telling the world that Kashmiri people are rebelling because of insufficient developmental work in the state, because of a paucity of *sadak, bijli and paani* (roads, electricity and water). Such views are patented by 'GoI-logic'. Strangely, what the Factory fails to realise is that if its statements were indeed true, every underdeveloped region in the world and each state in this country would be rebelling like the Kashmiris.

It is not as though India is speeding towards development. If it grows, it is at the cost of the poor and the disenfranchised who are in the majority. There have been three reports on the poverty rate in India. The Arjun

Sengupta report said that 77 per cent of Indians live on less than 20 rupees a day, while the N C Saxena Committee reported that 50 per cent of Indians lived below the poverty line. The Tendulkar Committee report came out with a figure pegged at 37 per cent, which was accepted by the Indian government as it reflected the lowest percentage out of the three reports.⁶

In September 2012, the Child Mortality Estimates Report 2012, released by UNICEF in New York, said that in 2011 around 50 per cent of the global under-five deaths occurred in just five countries – India, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan and China. Almost 19,000 children, less than five years of age, die every day across the world and India topped the list of countries with the highest number of such deaths (16,55,000) in 2011. India's toll was higher than the deaths in Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Pakistan put together.⁷ Despite calling itself a developing country, India remains underdeveloped, at least for its poor.

It is rather odd then that the protests in Kashmir are attributed to poor state development. India's systematic denial of the legitimate demands of Kashmiris has not led to the alienation of the people of Kashmir from India (as some politicians like reiterating). Rather, it has further strengthened the resistance movement and kept the sentiment of azadi alive.



For decades Pakistan has been claiming that Kashmir is its 'jugular vein' and India immediately reacts with the '*atoot ang*' (indispensable organ) theory. Both the countries have been laying claim to the same region, but what Kashmiris want has always been put on the backburner. There has been no dialogue on self-determination. The two countries talk about trade between the two divided parts of the region, fostering relations, travel permits but the core issue, the demands of the Kashmiri people, is never brought up.

Now the Indian Home Ministry is trying to get low ranking members of the moderate pro-freedom parties involved in the electoral process. They are being told to participate in the 2014 elections. A separatist leader in Srinagar, confidently and privately said, 'In the 2008 elections, moderates wanted to fight the elections, but the mass protests sparked by the Amarnath land row forced them to change their mind.'

In February 2012, Muhammad Yusuf Taing, a senior leader of the National Conference, in reply to a question, admitted over the phone, 'If separatists will fight the elections it will prove what they did all these years was wrong. They are responsible for the loss of Kashmir in which around 1,00,000 people died. (But) we welcome it if they fight the elections. We want them to come into (the) democratic field.'

Taing is not wrong in saying that if pro-freedom leaders participate in the elections, it covertly means that they believe that their past politics was flawed. Kashmiris might not accept this swing of pro-freedom leaders, and the leaders in turn are afraid of losing at the electoral level for this reason. The only way of establishing them is by rigging the elections.

Elections under the Indian Constitution, which the pro-freedom leaders have been opposing since the birth of this conflict, will be based on some negotiations. This was clear when the whistle-blower website, Wikileaks published several thousand diplomatic cables on its website, and shone a spotlight on Kashmir's politics too. The communication between a member of the moderate Hurriyat Conference, Bilal Ghani Lone, and United States officials was broadcast. 'Bilal had said that the APHC (All Party Hurriyat Conference) was considering joining elections in 2008, but conditions on the ground in Srinagar had to improve in order to make it safe enough for the group to do this,' Wikileaks revealed. Bilal had said the APHC needed to gain some small concessions from India so that it could say that its leaders' efforts had brought something home for the Kashmiri people.⁸

For Kashmiris, coming to the negotiating table is akin to forsaking the sentiment of independence. No leader who fights for the freedom of people can accept a compromise without the acceptance of the general public.

One is reminded, at this point, of Nelson Mandela's struggles in South Africa. He served 27 years in jail when he fought against apartheid and the system of racial segregation enforced for decades through legislation by the ruling national party governments in South Africa.

On 31 January 1985, State President of South Africa P W Botha, speaking in parliament, offered conditional freedom for the sixth time to Mandela. The condition was that he would 'unconditionally (reject) violence as a political weapon'.⁹ He was earlier offered exile in the Transkei. Mandela's daughter, Zinzi read his reply to this offer at a mass meeting in Jabulani Stadium, Soweto, on 10 February 1985. Mandela said:

...when all other forms of resistance were no longer open to us... we turned to armed struggle.... Too many have suffered for the love of freedom. I owe it to their widows, to their orphans, to their mothers and to their fathers who have grieved and wept for them.... I cannot sell my birthright, nor am I prepared to sell the birthright of the people to be free....

Only free men can negotiate. Prisoners cannot enter into contracts.¹⁰

Kashmiris too have no reason to negotiate.



On observing the current situation in Kashmir, one sees that it is run by the police. The force rules the whole state at gunpoint. The Kashmiri author of the memoir *Curfewed Night*, Basharat Peer writes about 12-year-old Faizan Sofi, who was arrested by the police on charges of waging a war against the state. Sofi was spotted by Babar Qadri, a young lawyer who represented scores of teenagers involved in the pro-independence protests of 2010. Peer writes, ‘According to information Qadri obtained from the Home Ministry thanks to India’s Right to Information Act, 5,504 protesters were arrested in 2010 alone, 70 per cent of them minors.’¹¹

‘Many were tortured,’ Qadri told Peer. ‘Beatings were routine. Mice were thrown into their trousers, and in some cases they were given petrol injections, which cause intense pain throughout the body.’¹²

Through all of this, the rulers chose routine rhetoric. In September 2012, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said that his endeavour was to take a peace dividend to every household and lay a strong edifice for a peaceful and prosperous Jammu and Kashmir, where justice and good governance would rule the roost. ‘The last three-and-a-half years of his government were a *success story of progress* on both *peace* and development fronts.... *restoration of peace* helped to carry forward development programmes on faster pace and attend the *public grievances* with more attention and concentration,’ Abdullah added. (Emphases mine)¹³

The chief minister seems to have forgotten the 2010 mass protests and killings of more than 120 teenagers during his rule of three-and-a-half years. There has been neither *peace* nor *prosperity* as he claims. His government has made terror a living reality for the general public and has taken away their freedom to express their *grievances*.

Kashmiris have yearned to see Abdullah’s claims transform into fact. People have been going from pillar to post to seek justice. They are not only abused by recommendations like the ones made by the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission (TRC),¹⁴ but are also told that information about their kith and kin cannot be revealed in the interests of the ‘security and sovereignty’ of the nation.

Kashmir’s present is Faizan and boys like him. The present gets injected with petrol to cause it pain. This pain builds a narrative, which then vows to come out on to the streets and protest. In the Valley, protesting is looked at as a criminal act and not as a legitimate fight for genuine rights. In the future, the present alone will decide the fate of Kashmir.

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 - 4 Daniel, Sam, ‘Kundankulam Row: Non-Bailable Warrant Issued Against Activist SP Udhayakumar’, in NDTV, 18 September 2012 <<http://www.ndtv.com/article/south/kudankulam-row-non-bailable-warrant-issued-against-activist-sp-udhayakumar-268883>> [accessed 17 March 2013].
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 - 10 Mandela, Nelson, *The Struggle Is My Life* (USA: Pathfinder Press, 1990).
 - 11 Peer, Basharat, ‘Lawless in Kashmir’, *International Herald Tribune (Global Edition of the New York Times)*, 7 September 2012.
 - 12 *Ibid.*
 - 13 ‘“My Govt’s 3 Yrs a Success Story of Peace, Development”: Omar’, *Kashmir Times*, 9 September 2012.

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Tariq Bhaijan, My Hero



Saima Bhat

Memories are sacred. How fortunate are those who have sharp memories...

The day was 14 July 1992. I was seven years old. I don't remember the exact time but it was morning. The sun was about to rise and birds were chirping, welcoming the flood of light. I was sad, as it was a school day. Still, I expected my mother to wake me up and help me get ready for class.

In bed, I was struggling to keep my eyes shut, so I could enjoy another five minutes of sleep. Suddenly, I heard some cries. At first, I thought I was dreaming. But when those cries didn't stop for several minutes, I got up and flung the quilt away. I ran down quickly to see what was happening. I entered the kitchen and to my surprise I saw one of our neighbourhood aunties. I wondered what she was doing in our kitchen, and that too at an early hour. She saw me and hugged me. Somehow I managed to free myself from her grasp and rushed towards the lawn, where I could hear some people talking. It was hard to understand what they were saying; there were far too many people speaking without pause.

I saw my father sitting on the veranda; he was weeping. It was the first time I was seeing tears course down my strongest Pa's face. I came close and hugged him, ran my fingers across his cheeks; I cannot see the tears of my family.

I did not know what was happening and the situation was so strange that I couldn't ask anybody about anything. Suddenly Pa murmured a few words; they were shocking and unbelievable! I ran away from him. I could not trust him, I told myself. He had to be lying; his statement couldn't be true.

Pa had said: '*Tariq shaheed hogayai.*' Tariq has been martyred.

It was impossible. Only the day before, in the evening, just a few hours ago, we had had dinner together.

Someone opened the main gate and I saw a group of women coming in, including my mother, the aunty and some relatives; all of them were crying. I heard some women talking. They were saying, it had happened the day before, at night. I saw my sister and cousins sitting in front of Mamma. I joined them and asked about the incident. Mamma spoke a little bit. What had happened was this:

The previous night, around dinner time, some of my uncle's friends got together at our place; they planned to visit a friend who was suffering from some illness. All of them left after having a little chat. Tariq Bhaijan was the last to leave. Even as he made his way out, I vaguely remember him looking back at all of us again and again. I glanced at him, and it seemed to me that he sighed. He then gifted me a smile and left. His friends and he talked for a while in lawn and made a move. The clock flashed the time: 10:30 pm.

After dinner, all of us – the kids – slept, while the elders stayed up and talked to my Fio (my father's sister), who had arrived only that day. At about 11 pm or so, they heard gun shots nearby. They got nervous because militancy was at its peak and every day news trickled in about encounters, killings, attacks. Soon, more gun shots were heard and in a while, the shots were relentless. Finally, there was a big bang, a blast. Pa, my uncles, Mamma, they all left for the main chowk of Barzulla, in the direction of the noise. They reached the place somehow, but after a point the local inhabitants stopped them from moving onward. The Indian forces swarmed the area, and then it was confirmed that Tariq Bhaijan was no more. One of his friends had also eloped with the death angel, and of the rest, some managed to save their lives and some were dragged away by the Indian forces.

That night, almost every person in our area was awake. But nobody dared to come out to see what was happening. There was one young boy alone who emerged to watch the goings-on, to witness the scene after the bloodbath. The Indian forces spotted him. He too was not spared; they shot him. With that, Barzulla lost three sons in an hour.



Around 11 am or 12 noon, I don't know the precise time, a tipper truck entered our gate. In some seconds, the truck got surrounded by a mob; nothing was visible. I rushed from my room upstairs to the veranda, where I

saw my beloved uncle lying. His face was pale. Everyone was crying and tears rushed to my eyes too. Someone told me: ‘Watch your uncle as much as you can because this is the last time you will be seeing him.’

I cried, I cried a lot, the tears would not stop. In just 10 minutes the truck left, carrying my Tariq Bhaijan along. Some ladies sang and some threw toffees over our sleeping groom. With his departure, the hot sun was replaced by black clouds. I recalled my grandfather had told me once: ‘When innocents get killed and brutalities assume terrifying forms, even the sky cries.’

That day’s darkness still overshadows our lives. After Tariq Bhaijan’s death, every single member of my family lived with the hope that we’d meet him again over dinner. But he always failed to join us.

I believed Tariq Bhaijan was alive; it was as if I could feel him. I had heard that when people die, their souls linger for 40 days so they can visit their families. I kept imagining my uncle’s soul watching us. I even talked to his photo frame in our drawing room, convinced that he was listening. Once, I told him about a problem. And the issue got resolved! My belief therefore only grew stronger.

The night my uncle was martyred, we were watching a movie, *Khuda Gawah* on our new colour television, which Pa had specially ordered for him. Bhaijan was very excited because it was the first TV in our house, that too in colour, and with a remote. We invited Fio for dinner and when she came, Bhaijan hid the remote in his pocket and told her, ‘See, I am ordering the TV to change channels, and it follows my orders!’ We were laughing loudly. And then suddenly, we stopped. Fights and bullets flashed on the TV as the film unspooled. Little did we know that the same bullets would ruin our world in just a few hours.

That day, when they carried away the body of my Bhaijan, they were actually carrying our world away. He was our beloved one, the darling of all the kids. Today, 18 years later, that position remains undisputed.

There are so many memories I have of my uncle. I remember, every Eid, he was the first person to give us Eidi (money gifted on Eid). He would take me and my sister shopping, buy us glittering purses, so our Eidi would be safe. We – my sister, my brother and I – would bring in each winter’s first snowfall in the kitchen with Bhaijan. And on special days, we’d collect the things he’d ask for, and he’d make *halwa* for us.

Bhaijan, always a social and friendly person, laughed loudly, and cared for everyone. He was smart and cool, and I remember how he used to carry his branded outfits. He was a style icon for our family and for his friends too. Even today, if anyone from our area takes his name, they add the suffix 'hero' to it.

It wasn't uncommon for Bhaijan's friends to borrow his outfits. But the clothes he was wearing the day he died were never returned to us. People say, those clothes changed colour, got stained red, and an unknown person from our locality kept them. Our religion commands us to bury a martyr along with his clothes. But the clothes my Bhaijan died in were lost. The Indian forces dragged the bodies of the martyrs with their vehicles, and I suppose, his clothes were claimed by barbed wires, then by an unknown entity.

Today, I know exactly what had happened that bloody night. My Tariq Bhaijan was a Pakistan-trained militant with the JKLF. That night, after visiting the ailing friend, his friends and he decided to sit by a shop, which happened to be their favourite spot. Nearby, in the fourth or fifth house, there was a meeting in session of Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) militants. In Barzulla, there is a CRPF camp, and they had received reports on the meeting. The CRPF men came to attack the HM militants. Unfortunately, by the neighbourhood shop, they saw my Bhaijan and his friends and attacked them. My Bhaijan fought back but it was all in vain. Those friends, who were more concerned about their own lives than those of their acquaintances, managed to escape. The rest were dragged by the Indian forces. And the HM militants didn't do anything to save them, since in those days there was intense rivalry between JKLF and HM militants. The whole of Barzulla had initially assumed that it was a fight between JKLF and HM men, but they soon learnt that the truth was more complex than that.

I remember the day my Bhaijan left for his armed training and the day he came back. I can't recall how long he inhabited Pakistan-administered Kashmir but when he reappeared, he was treated as though he had returned from that sacred place, Makkah. People came to greet him for days together and I recall how every guest was welcomed and served saffron-kehva. Every visitor was happy but my family was carrying a fake smile, maybe because they knew that the situation was soon going to change.

After that, the Indian forces used to come and search our house very frequently. It had become routine – they'd appear, ransack things and abuse our family while leaving. They used to come in the middle of the night too, thus making it tough for Bhaijan to come and see his family.

We liked spending at least some time with Bhaijan. So as kids, when Bhaijan would visit, one of us used to stand by the outside veranda (where I saw him the last time); one of us would stand by the gate; another would position himself outside by the bund. The one by the gate could see the sentinels by the veranda and the bund. The bund leading to our house was straight, and next to it was the river Doodh Ganga. So the vehicles of the Indian forces could be seen from a distance. If they were spotted, each cousin would relay information to the next, and the one on the veranda would run to Bhaijan and urge him to leave on time. We would have done much more, if we could, to help him.

My mom is also my Bhaijan's surrogate mother. My grandmother had passed away at a very young age, when my youngest uncle was just six months old. Then my father got married early and Mamma took the charge of the family; she became the mother of my young (teenage) uncles. Mamma used to make different dishes for Bhaijan and if he failed to visit home at night, she would keep his share separately. It had become a habit, to keep each and every thing aside for him. He was not special merely for us kids; he was a favourite of the elders too, which is why his demands were fulfilled on a priority basis.

After Bhaijan's death, everything changed. The Indian forces, who used to ransack our house when he was alive, accelerated the crackdowns. Once, they came searching during the day. Every male member, except one uncle, was out for work; the kids were in school. The uncle who was home was led upstairs where he was beaten mercilessly. He was left in a pool of blood, half dead, and the Indian forces took a huge amount of cash from the locker. These were the so-called 'soldiers of India'.

Soon, another uncle was arrested by the Indian forces from his college. He was kept at an unknown place. My grandfather and father searched for him in every police station and in every camp, but nobody gave any information. We filed an FIR with the concerned police station and after 10 days they contacted us and released him. When my uncle was released, he told Pa that he had been kept in an army camp where he had been asked to

hand over the gun of Tariq Bhaijan. My uncle said, it was ridiculous to ask for the gun of a person martyred five years ago.

These experiences made us stronger. Day by day, all things related to Tariq Bhaijan became memory. We are proud that he attained martyrdom for the motherland.



In the past 18 years I have witnessed the ups and downs of insurgency. I belong to a generation with childhoods marked by hartals, crackdowns, gun battles, killings, frisking, blasts, and bloodshed on streets. My Bhaijan wasn't the only one from our family who sacrificed his life. The year he died, we lost two more of our family members to the conflict. We managed to live without our beloved ones, much like hundreds and thousands of other families in Kashmir.

This year Kashmir's struggle will complete 24 years. Over the years, I have interacted with many people supporting some views, critiquing others. I have even heard people abusing those who have lost their lives; the reasons for this defeat me. Was their love for our motherland their fault? Why are we blaming them for the wrongdoings of others? As a result, when I look back, I can't see any moment when I can say without hesitation that I align myself with this community or that thought.

Someone told me: 'The present crisis in Kashmir is because of militants, who crossed the border in the name of jihad, established their business, then surrendered.' Somebody else mentioned: 'In the 90s, militancy was fashionable and most boys turned to it because it brought them name and fame.' There are many such stories that people weave here, and the various militant groups themselves are quick to blame one another for the condition of Kashmir.

In 2010, Kashmir lost more than 120 youngsters including children. Were the kids also wrong? Where are we heading?

I don't support this group's idea or that group's. I only respect our martyrs and their families.

From

The Kashmir Walla

'...magazine (that) mixes art and politics and covers everything from the disappearances to mass graves and all else...'

– BBC

Memorialising 13 July 1931 in Kashmir



Mridu Rai, July 2011

In the darkness of despair we saw a vision,
We lit the light of hope, and it was not extinguished...
...We sent our vision aswim like a swan on the river.
The vision became reality.... Bondage became freedom.
And this we left to you as your heritage.
O generation of freedom remember us, the generation of
the vision...

– Liam Mac Uistin

These lines of thankfulness for the sacrifices of generations of rebels who brought independence to Ireland in 1921 were written in an Irish poetic genre known as the *aisling*. The latter was devised in the 18th century as a way to express protest without drawing the heavy hand of Power's censorship. In the typical *aisling* the personified nation appears as a vision to mourn the torments of the present and augur the approaching return of providence. Liam Mac Uistin's poem evoked the solemn bequeathing of a legacy by those who envisioned freedom and struggled to achieve it to those generations, present and future, who were to enjoy its fruits. And at its heart was the invocation to remember. Such remembrance is not to be nostalgia; it is not to be a mere wistful reminiscing of the past. Instead, it is meant to serve as a powerful collective act of memorialising to galvanise a striding forward and the renovation of the past into the future.

Beginning in the 19th century, ever since nationalism became the predominant ideological vehicle to counter colonial dominance in India, memory became apotheosised in its culture. Events, people, places, words,

memory became symbolised. And memory became history; history, however, mapped out in specific ways.

Memory-as-history had to perform new ideological work. In the service of nationalism, and national imagining, memory's labour was to secure, represent, and symbolise that which is always precariously on the verge of being lost. One such loss that needed to be captured and reversed was the oblivion that follows death. History and memory came to be mustered for the task of what Jules Michelet, the 19th century historian of the French Revolution, described as exhuming the dead:

... each death leaves behind a little good – its memory – and demands that we tend it... I have given to many of the dead the help that I will myself need. I have exhumed them for a second life... They now live among us... In this way is a family made, a common city (built in which dwell) the living and the dead.¹

The purpose of exhumation was the powerful one of turning these deaths into sacrifices. Whether or not they themselves had seen it as such, the Historian, speaking on behalf of the anonymous dead, re-signified their deaths as the proffering of life for the revolutionary dream and for the 'imagined community' it produced. The dead became martyrs and their sacrifice was to be commemorated ever after for a nation – a city in which the dead and the living commune with each other – to come into being.

In India, too, nationalism partook of these innovatory elements of Europe's nationalisms. From the Munda *ulgulan* of 1900 to the massacre at Jallianwalla Bagh in 1919 and the many other victims of colonial reprisal, the anonymous dead were conscripted as the martyred foot soldiers of a nation-in-the-making. For Kashmiris, made double-subjects of the British empire in India and of the princely state the latter had installed under Dogra maharajas in 1846, nationalism's work of forging a nation and giving it political articulation involved taking a double step. It had to overthrow the yoke both of Dogra thralldom and of colonial dominance. Their martyrs could not be the same as those of the Indian nation. And it was 13 July 1931, not the familiar markers on the Indian Independence Movement's calendar, that gave Kashmiri nationalism its first sacrificial deaths for commemoration.

Srinagar, 13 July 1931

Several historians have elected this date to mark the inauguration of the 'freedom struggle' of Kashmiris against Dogra rule. Neither the events of that day in Srinagar nor the death toll of 22 demonstrators and one policeman seem so outstanding as to command remembrance when compared to contemporaneous developments in British India.² But this date was not intended to serve the fashioning of the Indian nation. In Kashmir, the date's emblematic importance drew from the fact that it was the first time a gathering of Kashmiri Muslims had openly challenged the Dogra maharaja and his government.

The portentous events of that day had followed upon rumours, spreading since mid-1931, about the maharaja's officials mistreating Muslims and deliberately offering insults to Islam in Jammu. The report that elicited the most vehement reaction was about a Hindu police constable who had not only prevented a Muslim subordinate from saying his prayers, but had also added to this insult the injury of throwing the latter's copy of the Quran to the ground. Later investigation found the account of this incident to have been exaggerated although not entirely without basis. However, it brought to a head a gathering discontent born out of a number of factors other than the purely religious among Muslims in the state and, by the time its reports reached Srinagar, it set the stage for the unprecedented occurrences of the following days.

On 25 June, Abdul Qadir, identified by some as a Pathan and others as a Punjabi servant of a European vacationing in Kashmir, made an inflammatory speech at a meeting held in a Srinagar mosque that condemned the Dogra Maharaja and 'incit(ed) his hearers to kill Hindus and burn their temples'. He was promptly arrested. A general impression created by accounts of subsequent events was of an unprovoked attack led by Srinagar Muslims against unwitting Hindus. However, Kashmiri Pandits and other Hindus, shaken by the expression of such hostile sentiments as those of Qadir, had not been sitting by idly either; they disseminated their own set of rumours. One such, spreading like wildfire and indicating the fear felt by a 'minority' of possibly losing ground in the state to an increasingly vocal Muslim 'majority', was that the Dogra ruler was about to lift the state-wide prohibition on cow slaughter.³ Segments of both the Hindu and Muslim populations in Kashmir were raising their defences and the situation was moving inexorably towards a confrontation.

On 13 July, when Abdul Qadir was to be tried at the Central Jail in Srinagar, a crowd had attempted to enter the jail to protest his prosecution. In retaliation, the police fired into the gathering that then scattered and went on a 'rampage' in Srinagar city. In Maharajgunj, a quarter of Srinagar inhabited predominantly by Kashmiri Pandits and Punjabi Hindu traders, 'crowds of Mohammadan hooligans' attacked shops, looted large quantities of goods and 'committed indiscriminate assaults'. The British resident in Kashmir, however, had reported that 'there had... recently (been) much discussion among Mohammadans (in Kashmir) about their grievances against the comparatively small Hindu community... which, as *a result of a mistaken policy of many years standing, ha(d) been allowed to monopolise most of the appointments in the State*' (emphasis added). Yet, the resident still confessed that 'no one (had) for a moment suspected than (sic) any danger was to be feared in the city of Srinagar'. Evidently taken by surprise by the overt 'activism' of the Kashmiri Muslims, the maharaja's government devised makeshift and quick fix solutions. Relying on the tested strategy of his predecessor, Maharaja Hari Singh 'received a deputation of all the leading Muslims of the city' with a view to removing their apprehensions. Meeting with the ruler, members of these eminent Muslims assured him of their 'unfaltering loyalty'. However, as the resident suggested, the greatest difficulty the maharaja would have to face would come, not from the small Kashmiri Muslim élite but, from the public disapproval of his policies freely expressed in British India and particularly in Punjab.⁴

The events of July 1931 had catapulted a number of new actors on the political stage of Kashmir each seeking to capitalise on the momentum of Muslim discontent unleashed through these incidents. A younger generation of Muslim politicians led by Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah and aiming at broad social bases of mobilisation was pitted against the older and more socially exclusive and élite leadership of the Jama Masjid Mirwaiz and others. These Kashmiris were joined in their competition for the leadership of Muslims in the Valley, by two rival sets of interests from the Punjab represented by the Ahmediyas and the Ahrars. By mid-August 1931, the resident was already reporting on dissatisfaction among the Kashmiri Muslims being fuelled by letters from Muslim organisations from outside the state urging them to keep up their agitation. Under such prompting, Kashmiri Muslims led by Sheikh Abdullah had refused to meet with the

maharaja on 6 August 1931, aiming to ‘procrastinate’ until 14 August.⁵ The latter date had been declared ‘Kashmir Day’ throughout ‘Muhammedan centres in British India’ by the Kashmir Committee formed only a week after the killings of 13 July and supported by large numbers of the Valley’s Muslims long settled in the Punjab.

In the aftermath of 13 July, and viewing with trepidation the bleeding of political protest across their carefully demarcated and vigilantly policed borders between the Punjab and the Dogra state, the British colonial government of India exercised its prerogative as paramount power to appoint a commission, working under the direction of B J Glancy, to examine the grievances that had caused the disturbances. Its report of 1932 included a powerful indictment of the Kashmir durbar’s partisan functioning in favour of its Hindu subjects to the neglect of Muslims. Strikingly, the report had also invalidated the principle of ‘first peoples’ on the basis of which the Dogras and Pandits had re-imagined Kashmir as ‘originally’ Hindu. Glancy’s report provided a corrective to nearly a century of marginalising the largest number of the Kashmir state’s subjects. Through its many recommendations, it re-inscribed Muslims into their history and region. And, perhaps unconsciously, it also redefined the contemporary territory of Kashmir – no matter what lay beneath its historical layers – as Muslim. From here on, the challenge gathered a momentum that would end only when it had stripped the legitimacy of the Dogra princes to rule over Kashmiris. Over the following decade, this newly ‘grounded’ assertiveness extended into a wider struggle for the fulfilment of a spectrum of economic and political demands that culminated in the unravelling of Dogra sovereignty itself in 1947.

Remembering Martyrs’ Day, 1947 to the Present

But days of commemoration are not themselves beyond history. Acts of remembrance are always intended to serve the construction of the present, even as their legitimating meaningfulness is seen as extending into the limitless future. Whereas, 13 July 1931 was conspicuously memorialised ever since it was marked by death symbolised as sacrifice, until 1947 it had been annexed to the struggle against the Dogra monarchy. After 1947, however, it came to be marshalled for quite a different need in Kashmir:

that of nation building. Indeed memory can be seen as a defining sign of the period 1947 to 1989, bookended by a freedom insufficiently achieved through its being made subservient to Indian nationalism on the one hand, and a final break with India's unmet democratic promises through militant rejection on the other.

Barely 15 years after B J Glancy's remedial steps had finally reinstated Kashmiri Muslims into their homeland, this recognition of their claims to Kashmir's territory was overwhelmed by the assertion of Indian nationalism's sole claim to the territory of the entirety of the subcontinent – that which remained after the carving out of Pakistan – from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. Indeed, since Independence in India, there has been a steady recycling and circulation of the rhetoric of vivisection derived from partition narratives – of memories of the bloodbath that accompanied that division, of hyperbolically expressed fears of another partition or balkanisation, and of a 'total disintegration of India'. These have served to reinforce dramatically both the idea of the nation as geo-body and of its parts as 'atoot ang'. And secessionist sentiments and movements in Tamil Nadu and the Northeast so soon after the Indian nation had allegedly come into its own, only aggravated this nationalist anxiety. In these circumstances, any arrant expression of regional pride was deemed suspect but especially so when emanating from a province whose inclusion in the union was contingent and codicillary. 13 July would continue to be celebrated but as subordinated to 15 August (and in the Kashmir across the border to 14 August).

The need then grew ever more urgent to return to a commemoration with salience for Kashmir. After 1947, Sheikh Abdullah's nation building programme rested on his economic reform programme, 'Naya Kashmir', and the ideological construct of *Kashmiriyat*, a regional mirroring of Nehruvian secularism in India, that asserted that being Kashmiri was more important than being Hindu or Muslim. Martyrs' Day, which had in any event come to be associated with the *Sher-e-Kashmir* since 1931, was now appropriated even more firmly as its special day by the National Conference, a party that grew increasingly centralised and intolerant of internal dissent as the first euphoria of snatching freedom from the Dogras in 1950s began to show signs of celebration fatigue. Indeed the more intense the challenges – both external and internal – to its hegemony grew, the greater reliance it placed on jubilation, ovation, commemoration and

memorialisation of that day in July now long gone to bolster the legitimacy of its dominance. As one Kashmiri, Mohammad Ashraf, growing up in those decades recalls in his blog:

...the memory we have from our school days is of the massive turnout and a colourful tribute paid to these martyrs on this day every year. Every locality would send its own procession. There used to be an official procession of smartly dressed policemen who would pay a formal tribute to the martyrs.⁶

But national day celebrations are a poor substitute for effective governance. As the National Conference showed increasing signs of corruption and authoritarian overbearance, Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor, one time poet laureate of Abdullah's brand of Kashmiriyat-informed nationalism, now delivered a powerful indictment of the redacted version of freedom that had become Kashmir's lot. '...Poverty and starvation, Repression and lawlessness, It is with these happy blessings, That she has come to us,'⁷ he wrote. As time passed and the workings of human memory, in holding the past together, proved increasingly wanting, the commemorated date became a fertile ground for contest over what the past of subject and community meant. In any case, it has to be remembered that 13 July could not have universal appeal in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Dogra Jammu could not find much cause for exultation in that date and even in the Valley, for Kashmiri Pandits the memory was tarnished by recollections of the attacks on their community that was also part of that day's happenings.

In 1975, the Indian centre had released a chastened Sheikh Abdullah, forcing the Delhi Accord on him and de-fanging the politics of independence for Kashmir he had championed on and off ever since the accession. And alongside this quiescence, its celebration of Martyrs' Day became a more tempered affair. As Ashraf recalls for us:

...the processions were continued on a grand scale till 1975 when there was a u-turn in the movement. The official tribute continued even after that date but on a smaller scale. The common people would go on their own to offer fateh to the martyrs as they were considered the pioneers who had in reality started the movement, which was still going on!

Thus, as the National Conference became mostly the party of the status quo after 1975, there was also a disjuncture between what 13 July came to signify for the party and for the people. To the point that Sheikh Abdullah's grave itself needed to be sequestered from the wrath of betrayal of his people.

Whereas in the decades immediately following 1947, 13 July could still be remembered with buoyancy and hope, after 1989 it became the subject of elegy and memorialisation. As optimism yielded to a pervading sense of loss, as thousands of Kashmiris filled the hundreds of martyrs' graveyards dug up in a frenzy to bury the mounting numbers of the dead, the symbolism of grief took over and pathologised memory. There were few more eloquent voices to emerge from the turmoil of the 1990s than that of Agha Shahid Ali. His laments for the dead became the collective expression of Kashmiri grief, encoding within his verses a variety of conflicting impulses and anxieties. History and memory were sundered from each other. And memory became the weapon of the dominated to confront history, the tool of the dominant.

And after 1990, no memory and memorialisation of Kashmir's past could properly ignore a gaping hole in its society. As the Valley was vacated of its most important minority of the Kashmiri Pandits, the memory of Martyrs' Day came to be partitioned. One particularly acerbic denunciation of Martyrs' Day pitched very recently from the ranks of Roots in Kashmir in fact even characterised Maharaja Hari Singh as a 'patriot' and the offending Abdul Qadir as an accomplice in a British conspiracy to dislodge him.⁸ Other Pandit expressions of discomfort were less polemically delivered and less comprised in their stand of a common future in Kashmir. They were for that reason also more poignant. In these instances, the memories of individual Pandits returned continually to retrieve a form of historical memory that located and supported communities of marginalised victims. Their striving found an echoing response in the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali – a lyrical rewriting of memory in which pointed divisions were sought to be dissolved in a narrative of shared suffering, extending history into the memories of those who were excluded.

Again I've returned to this country
where a minaret has been entombed
...each house buried or empty
Empty? Because so many fled, ran away,
and became refugees there, in the plains,
where they must now will a final dewfall
to turn the mountains to glass. They'll see
us through them – see us frantically bury

houses to save them from fire that, like a wall,
caves in. The solders light it, hone the flames,
burn our world to sudden papier-mâché.⁹

Thus spoke the poet of the fractured present but with the entreaty to remember those departed; both the dead and the exiled.

May this 13 July be a solemn remembering of the legacy of your generations of the vision. On this Martyrs' Day, through remembering your fallen innocents, may you create a new freedom by standing up to oppression with a vision of peace!

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- 1 Michelet, Jules, 'Preface', *Histoire du XIXe Siècle*, vol 2, cited in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), p 198. The translation from the French is mine and is a rough one. Michelet's excerpted original words are as follows: '*...chaque mort laisse un petit bien, sa mémoire, et demande qu'on la soigne... J'ai donné à beaucoup de morts trop oubliés l'assistance dont moi-même j'aurai besoin. Je l'ai exhumés pour une seconde vie...Ils vivent maintenant avec nous... Ainsi se fait une famille, une cité commune entre les vivants et les morts.*'
 - 2 In British India, the closing years of the 1920s, following the withdrawal of the first non-cooperation movement and the pro-Khilafat mobilisation, had witnessed bloodbaths brought about by Hindus and Muslims retreating from a common struggle into their separate and hostile camps.
 - 3 R/1/1/2064, Crown Representative's Reports (Political Department), Maharaja Hari Singh's Message, dated 9 July 1931, IOL.
 - 4 *Ibid.* From the Resident in Kashmir, dated 17 July 1931 & from the Resident in Kashmir, dated 3 August 1931.
 - 5 *Ibid.* From the Resident in Kashmir, dated 17 August 1931.
 - 6 Kashmir First <<http://www.kashmirfirst.com/aboutus.htm>> [accessed July 6, 2011].
 - 7 Mahjoor, Ghulam Ahmad, *The Best of Mahjoor* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1989), p 107.
 - 8 '13 July 1931 in the Pages of History', in Roots in Kashmir <<http://kashmiris-in-exile.blogspot.com/2010/07/13-july-1931-in-pages-of-history.html>> [accessed 6 July 2011].
 - 9 Ali, Agha Shahid, *The Country Without a Post Office: Poems 1991-1995* (India: Orient Blackswan, 2000), p 25.

‘Complete Apathy On the Part of Indian Civil Society’



Interview by Fahad Shah & Sheikh Saleem, October 2011

Parvez Imroz is a human rights lawyer and a civil rights activist. He graduated in science from Srinagar in 1972 and then got his LLB degree at the Law College Aligarh Muslim University in 1975. Imroz joined the Jammu and Kashmir High Court as a lawyer in 1978. From the late 80s, he initiated and led campaigns for human rights, seeking justice for the victims of severe violations, including killings, tortures, rapes and forced ‘disappearances’.

Imroz is the founder and president of the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) that works to build local alliances between Kashmiri civil society groups and provide legal help to the families of the victims. As a consequence, Imroz has faced a ruthless backlash and has been continually attacked. In this interview with *The Kashmir Walla* editor, **Fahad Shah** and contributor **Sheikh Saleem**, he says, ‘These attacks and attempts at intimidation did not deter us, we continued with our work.’ Excerpts:

Is the Kashmir dispute the reason for unmarked graves or is it laws like AFSPA?

Today in the conflict, wherever there are disappearances, unmarked graves emerge. Prior to the 1990s, we didn’t have unmarked graves because there were no disappearances.

We believe that the forces have complete impunity. They can’t be prosecuted and as a result they feel they have the licence to do anything, to kill.

But more dangerous is the moral impunity they receive from Indian civil society. In 2002, in Gujarat, when more than 2,000 Muslims were killed, there was a huge outcry in India and the media spoke out against the riots. When violations are reported in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan, Indians get together and protest. But we rarely see an uproar of equal magnitude when people are killed in Kashmir. For the most part, there is silence.

The spate of human rights abuses, and now the candid admission by a state institution of the existence of 2,156 unmarked graves has not shaken the conscience of this country. There is complete apathy on the part of Indian civil society. And this is despite the fact that mass graves are crimes against humanity.

How do you view the government's reaction to the issue of unmarked mass graves?

It has become huge issue internationally. The state government's response is that they have promised to consider only one recommendation made by the SHRC, which is DNA testing. This is what they have said in the legislative assembly. But they are yet to respond to the list we had given the chief minister earlier, citing 1,417 missing people. All they reiterate is that they will 'look' into the issue. From the Union of India there is no response. Even civil society groups in India are silent. We have been sending letters to the Indian prime minister. While local politicians from different political parties have asserted that this is a serious issue and it must be discussed, the central government has yet to make a statement.

What legal recourse can one take in this case?

Within eight weeks' time the recommendation of SHRC is to be considered by the state government, irrespective of whether they accept it or reject it. The chief minister has stated in the assembly that his government will conduct DNA tests. That takes care of one recommendation. But there were *six* recommendations made by the commission – what about the remaining five?

Legally, the matter can be presented before the Supreme Court of India or the Jammu and Kashmir High Court. But first we need to account for all the graves. The commission has accepted the report made by Police

Investigation Wing of the SHRC which says that nearly 2,156 of 2,730 graves are unidentified. But the report is restricted to three districts of North Kashmir. The fact is that mass graves are present across all districts, with the exception of Jammu city probably.

We are asking for the existence of unmarked and mass graves to be looked into in all districts. Let us first establish how many unmarked and mass graves actually exist in all of Jammu and Kashmir.

How are you supporting this endeavour?

After the SHRC concluded its investigation in North Kashmir, we submitted prima facie evidence about the existence of 3,844 unmarked graves in Rajouri and Poonch districts, which we have received from very credible and reliable sources. The SHRC has issued notices to the district magistrates of Poonch and Rajouri to respond to these allegations. Now the next date of hearing at the SHRC is 18 October 2011; let's see what the response of the government is and how best to follow up. Perhaps following a reaction from the district magistrates of Poonch and Rajouri, the SHRC will ask its Police Investigation Wing to carry out investigations like the ones spearheaded in North Kashmir, across the state.

Do you feel the issue of unmarked graves is reported sufficiently by the local media?

The local media is mostly controlled by the government, and by forces such as advertising. So it is crippled. The Indian media however has highlighted the issue on occasion. When facts about mass graves were first leaked, it was a pleasant surprise for us that the issue was reported by *The Indian Express*, followed by others, including the electronic media. As a result, the issue now confronts Indian civil society, and we hope they pressurise the central government to adopt a severe stance against unlawful killings.

The issue of mass graves was debated in the J&K assembly. Are you satisfied with the way it was debated?

I am not satisfied. You know, the way it was presented, it seemed like a formality the government was trying to dispense with. There were no clear positions. I'm not interested in posturing; I'm seeking action. Political parties have been making a noise about human rights abuses in Kashmir;

the opposition makes statements for the benefit of Delhi; the state government wants people to believe that they are entirely helpless. Nobody is serious. Nobody is being held accountable.

Observe the conduct of mainstream parties. For instance, look at the PDP. You'll see that in their 2002 elections manifesto they said that they would be holding a commission to probe into disappearances. After coming to power, they did nothing. After coming to power, their law minister said that there was already a commission, that there was no need to make a parallel commission, and that only the SHRC had to be empowered. Soon after that the chairperson of the SHRC resigned, levelled serious allegations against the government and said that the SHRC existed only to hoodwink the world community.

After the SHRC report on unmarked graves, sections of Indian civil society are saying that state institutions are functioning in Kashmir. But the truth is that this report is just the tip of the iceberg and we are still to learn what the follow-ups will be. Let's not forget the example of Punjab, where thousands of Sikhs disappeared, and were found to have been killed and cremated. Reports were written; a noise made; a human rights activist, Jaswant Khalra, who brought several disappearances in Punjab to light, himself disappeared. The case was then taken to the Supreme Court, and so far nothing tangible has emerged for the families of the victims.

What does the IPTK/APDP involve itself with, apart from identifying unmarked graves or accounting for disappeared persons?

The APDP is creating profiles of disappeared persons and soon with the support of the IPTK a report on the problem of enforced disappearances will be published. The IPTK is separately working on the issue of torture as well. In Jammu and Kashmir, we have 1,00,000 torture survivors who have been severely tormented, who have developed one or the other deformity. Sadly, this is the most prevalent of human rights violations in Kashmir, the second being killing. Yet the issue of torture in this land is rarely addressed. Several torture victims die and are forgotten; the causes ascribed to their death may seem banal and normal, like kidney failure. Yet the truth is that they die, sometimes years later, as a result of the torture they were once subjected to. In 2010, officially 5,000 persons were arrested; a huge percentage of these have been tortured. Yet there is little documentation,

which means that the situation does not get studied sufficiently by the international community.

You are fighting a case against the current Director General of Police (DGP). What is the case about?

Four people were abducted from Bhaderwah by the Village Defence Committee (VDC) and special police officials. Three among them were later killed and their bodies were thrown into the Chenab river. One among them, Talib Hussain, who escaped, spoke about the encounter. The families were worried that proper investigations would not be carried out. Since they were sure that police officials higher up were involved in the matter (under whose control the VDCs work), they approached the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and sought a CBI investigation.

The police conducted a defective and weak investigation as a matter of procedure. Then they filed a case of murder against one Mohammad Ashraf who was allegedly responsible for abduction and killing. The weak and defective investigation resulted in the acquittal of Ashraf.

Recently, the aggrieved families came to know through an *Indian Express* report about a parallel crime branch investigation, which was ordered by the then DGP on the instructions of the NHRC. The crime branch reinvestigation report by one Bachan Singh Chaudhary indicted the then Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG), who is now the DGP. This crime branch report was not submitted before a trial court, which of course meant that the case weakened and the accused got acquitted.

According to this crime branch report, the then DIG Kuldeep Khoda had instructed and provided arms, ammunition and all the necessary logistical intelligence to the killers. Kuldeep Khoda, according to this crime branch report, also had directed the driver of a police vehicle to remain at the disposal of Mohammad Ashraf and his associates. It appears from the crime branch report that Kuldeep Khoda knew what they were up to, and met the killers before and after the offence. The indictment of the then DIG was hushed and Bachan Singh Chaudhary was transferred. In the follow-up report of the crime branch by a female police officer Shika Goel, the allegations were substantiated and she further stated that evidence had been tampered.

So we are saying this: Keeping in view that several high profile cases in the Supreme Court – including the Best Bakery case, the Jessica Lal

murder case, and the Priyadarshini Mattoo case – managed acquittals in trail courts, there should be a fair trial in this situation. A re-investigation should be ordered, which is the least the victims can expect. The culprits should be exposed, put on trial and interrogated. We should also determine what happened to bodies; they have yet to be found. Whether they were thrown into a river or buried in one of the many unmarked graves – this must be ascertained.

As a veteran human rights activist have you encountered any pressure?

Oh yes. On 30 April 2005, I was attacked when I laid the foundation stone for the memorial of disappeared persons. At 5:30 am, a man knocked at my residence. Sensing foul play, I refused to open the door. The man kept knocking, so I raised an alarm, and secured the attention of my neighbours and relatives. The person at my door had to flee. I promptly sent urgent action requests to human rights groups around the world, including Amnesty International.

Then on 30 June 2008, there was attack on my house; a grenade was thrown towards it. There was an attempt at abduction, and the army was present. Finally the European parliament passed a resolution. It urged the Indian government to grant me protection and asked it to look into the events of June 2008.

The attack in 2008 was probably because we were investigating unmarked and mass graves. At that time, we had disclosed only 940 unmarked graves in the Uri sub-district in our first report, *Facts Under Ground*. These attacks and attempts at intimidation did not deter us, we continued with our work, publishing another report, *Buried Evidence* in 2009.

How would you respond to the chief minister's proposition of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

We believe that there can't be reconciliation without justice. This means that the perpetrators, who have to be identified, must be brought to book, and the prosecution of the perpetrators should be followed by reparations. We therefore believe that there should be a Truth and *Justice* Commission where truth prevails and creates conditions for everlasting peace. Presently

though, the impunity the perpetrators of crime enjoy in Kashmir is in conflict with India's claims of being a democratic, just nation.

It's also important to remember that a TRC generally emerges in a post-conflict scenario, whereas in Jammu and Kashmir the conflict is still alive. Perhaps the state government wished to model a commission akin to the one in South Africa, where reconciliation was required between two communities (which incidentally invited a lot of criticism because the perpetrators there were not punished and a bad precedent was set). Or perhaps Omar Abdullah asked for a TRC because he believed that the perpetrators of crime in Kashmir could not or should not be punished.

However it's not the chief minister who can forgive or push for reconciliation; it is the victims. The right is vested with the injured parties alone, and they must decide if they are willing to forgive or reconcile.

Journalism in Kashmir



David Barsamian, January 2012

For obvious reasons freedom of the press in Kashmir is limited and constrained. Military occupation with its attendant curfews, roadblocks, checkpoints, searches, surveillance, wiretapping of calls and emails, and state-sponsored violence from custodial deaths and extrajudicial killings to torture and disappearances, produce immense pain and suffering among Kashmiris. Intimidation and fear are widespread. That is the intent and design and logic of occupation.

In such a repressive and oppressive atmosphere people are reluctant to speak freely and provide information to journalists, and journalists do not have freedom of movement to report stories. Occupation nourishes and sustains a climate of timidity, paranoia, and intense psychological distress.

The uprising and resistance in Kashmir to Indian rule is one of the major news stories in the world yet it is underreported. The Indian state has been diligent in framing and manufacturing the news messages coming from Kashmir. It has broken windowpanes and hearts all over besieged Kashmir. In addition to a series of draconian laws, which are imposed arbitrarily and without any legal recourse there is a campaign to censor and control journalists.

Another issue complicating the functioning of journalists is the vast network of state spies who deliberately spread disinformation and rumours. In addition, the Indian state directly deports journalists if they are already in Kashmir (as in the case of Jon Alper), or prevents them from entering Kashmir from the Srinagar airport (as in the case of Gautam Navlakha), or denies entry at any one of the international airports. Of course if journalists report on Kashmir within the conventional government framework they encounter no problems and are garlanded with *malas*.

In late November 2011 I visited to the Committee to Protect Journalists in New York. I learnt that of the top countries in which journalists experienced the most difficulty, five are South Asian – Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and India. Pakistan is at the top of the list and India is at number 13. ‘India,’ the official I spoke with told me, ‘is moving up the list.’

At a time when rebellions and revolts are erupting over large swathes of India, journalism is crucial for not only the world community to know what’s going on but also for Indians themselves. An unimpeded free press is essential to the functioning of democracy. In reporting on Kashmir and other conflict areas journalists, in addition to being deported, are threatened, harassed and in some cases beaten, as happened recently in Srinagar.

As long as the Indian state continues to portray the struggle for freedom in Kashmir as an expression of Pakistani driven terrorism and denies the aspirations of most Kashmiris and their right of self-determination, the people of India and the rest of the world will never understand what fuels Kashmir’s discontent with Indian rule. Kashmir is packaged in a public relations campaign as a magical tourist destination where middle class Indians escape the heat of the plains in the summer, stroll in the Shalimar gardens, stay on houseboats and enjoy shikara rides across Dal Lake, and in winter pretend that they are in Switzerland as they frolic in the snow. Bollywood’s portrayal of Kashmir in films tends to reinforce clichés from romantic visions to jihadi fanatics who lust for blood. These stereotypical images are light years away from the brutal and harsh realities faced by average Kashmiris every day of their lives. The fare offered by TV talking heads replicates the US Fox network model, in that they obfuscate, mislead, traduce, slander, and fabricate.

Real journalism should go where the silences are. It should go into the darkest corners and shine light into them. It should be fearless and courageous. It should be uncovering the mass graves dotting Kashmir. It should be focussing on massive human rights violations, collective punishment, custodial deaths, sexual molestation, fake encounters and the plight of the mentally disturbed, orphans and half-widows. It should investigate war crimes and name the members of the security forces, intelligence agencies and officials in Srinagar and Delhi who are responsible. It should be in an adversarial relationship with power.

To be invited to have tea with Omar Abdullah or *dosa* with Chidambaram is a sign of journalists failing their duty. This is embedded journalism at its worst. Why? Because state officials want to seduce journalists with access to power and manipulate the flow of information through leaks, half-truths and lies. The classic aphorism, which historically informed US journalism was: Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Sadly in the world's second largest democracy that adage has been largely forgotten, as it seems to be in the world's largest democracy as well.

Journalists who curry favour and approval from higher-ups are *chamchas*. They are experts in makaree or deception and have sold themselves for career advancement. Access to ministers in Delhi or corporate bigwigs in Mumbai are signs of their moral corruption and the desire to get ahead at the expense of reporting the truth. Thus they function as stenographers. They are lapdogs with laptops, and in most instances, become de facto instruments of the state and conveyor belts of propaganda.

Even with all the difficulties I have cited above, some of the bravest journalists I know are Kashmiri. They cut through the layers of barbed wire and report the facts without fear or favour. I am proud to know them.

Report Amidst Sobs: Omar Died After Arrest



Fahad Shah, October 2010

‘A young boy has died in hospital. He was arrested by the police on Friday,’ a friend told me when I was leaving from my home. He said the boy had been beaten up and arrested during Friday protests, and he had now succumbed to his injuries. I ran back home to get my camera and notebook. Then I went straight to the main road where a procession along with the boy’s body was heading towards Buchpora. In a sea of people, I could see faces of my neighbours, my friends, raising slogans and wailing, shouldering the plank on which the body was lying.

Omar Qayoom Bhat, 17, a class 11 student of Malik Sahib Soura, had emerged from a mosque after offering Friday prayers. Eyewitnesses said that as he stepped out and walked a few metres people start shouting slogans. He joined them and suddenly the police arrived. He was caught by the police and the CRPF beat him with sticks and helmets. ‘They thrashed him against the shop shutters and this immediately rendered him unconscious and injured. He was then dragged and taken to the police station,’ Uzair (name changed), an eyewitness said.

Omar was beaten up by the police and the CRPF on Friday, 20 August and then tortured in the Soura police station during his arrest. He died on 24 August at 3 pm after losing a 51-hour battle for life.

The death certificate showed the cause of death was respiratory hypertension with severely deranged blood gases, diffuse intrapulmonary haemorrhage and blunt trauma on the chest. Biographical details would reveal that he was the only son of his father, Abdul Qayoom Bhat who is an employee with the Waqf Board and has three daughters.

Women on the roadside were beating their chests, their eyes filled with tears, even while the procession moved on. With more people joining in

from adjacent localities the procession swelled. In the crowds were young boys who had been friends with Omar. Tears rolling down their cheeks, they took turns at carrying the plank with the cold, bruised body of the boy they once knew.

Qayoom said his son has been severely tortured in the police station and they didn't release him even after the bail was approved by the district magistrate. 'I went to the police station on 21 August where my son told me to take him to the hospital. He wept when he revealed that the police and the CRPF men had beaten him severely and had given power shocks to his wounds,' Qayoom told me.

The concerned executive magistrate, Bashir Ahmed Balkhi however said that he had asked the SHO to approve of Omar's bail, but the SHO refused. 'I told him I will act as the guarantor for his bail but he didn't accept my word,' Balkhi said.

While I clicked pictures and tried to get clear, close-up shots, the procession approached a CRPF camp at Buchpora. And it was there that young boys joined their hands and created a human chain. They stopped us from moving further. They decided to turn back, as I overheard someone saying, 'Moving on will lead to a massacre. There is a big CRPF camp and people are angry. We don't have to confront them right now. Let's return.'

I saw women following the men, raising pro-freedom slogans, moving in the procession back to Soura. As decided by the elders of the area, Omar had to be buried in his ancestral graveyard which could be seen from his home. We reached Omar's house where his body was to be given the funeral bath. I waited outside. Women were in a tight circle wailing, while Omar's sisters pulled at their hair as they saw their brother's body.

While people were bathing Omar's body, some angry boys – most of them Omar's friends – started throwing stones at CRPF personnel and policemen who restricted the movement of the procession within Soura. Tear gas shells were fired in retaliation and bullet shots were heard from the lane where I waited for people to come along with Omar's bathed body. Elders urged the boys not to throw stones till Omar was buried. Several requests later, they agreed.

Friends of Omar believed that his killing ought to be probed by human rights organisations. They had earlier gone to the police station to lodge a complaint, but the police refused to take note. 'How can the police register

a complaint against themselves?’ one of Omar’s friends said, perhaps all too wisely. ‘But we won’t let the killers of Omar roam free.’

The funeral prayers were to be held at a local shrine, Jenab Sahib Soura. From his house Omar’s body was now taken to the shrine. It was kept in the courtyard. I went up to a minaret to get a picture of the gathering. I could see hundreds of people in rows.

In a green plywood casket, covered in a green cloth revealing verses from the Holy Quran, Omar’s body was taken to the graveyard. With him, the procession passed through lanes and by-lanes. It was about to reach the main road when a tear gas shell burst near my legs. This didn’t surprise me. People were pleading before the CRPF men, begging them for permission so the procession could pass peacefully. Finally, they were given the licence to bury their dead.

Omar was buried in a grave near a brick wall in a corner of the graveyard. Omar waits for justice from Omar.

I returned home. A month later, that day still troubles me. Wails still echo in my ears. I am haunted by Omar. But then I remember that there were and are many more like him who have lost their lives to bullets, tear gas shells, torture or newly introduced pellets.

Since Omar’s death, 110 people have been killed in the action of the police and paramilitary forces.

The Meaning of Maqbool Butt



P G Rasool, February 2012

Regarding revolutionary struggles, Eqbal Ahmad writes in *Confronting Empire*, 'A strategy of moral isolation assumes that the adversary has based its own legitimacy on moral grounds.'¹ In retrospect we can analyse the life and sacrifice of Muhammad Maqbool Butt in this context. Maqbool Butt has thrown a lasting moral challenge to India, especially since the Indian state views itself not as a totalitarian or fascist regime but one that claims liberal democracy as its moral and political *raison d'être*.

Maqbool Butt, a Kashmiri revolutionary, was hanged in Tihar jail on 11 February 1984. But his body was not handed over to his family; rather, he was buried in Tihar jail. And more than a decade later, some construction work has been attempted by authorities to erase the grave itself. This fact was brought to light by a veteran Kashmiri journalist, Iftikhar Gilani, who was himself incarcerated in the jail for some time a few years ago.

In the first instance, why was Butt's body not given to his family? And still later, why has his grave been wiped away under the pretext of construction? Needless to say, pro-freedom Kashmiri groups have been demanding the return of the mortal remains of Maqbool Butt. There is even a grave in his name standing ready in the largest graveyard of Kashmir, Eidgah, Srinagar.

Why has New Delhi been afraid of Butt?

The reason is simple. It's because Butt was a respected radical and is now a revered martyr. When alive, as a revolutionary leader, Butt remained uncompromising and unwavering in his pro-independence position, unlike Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah. In death – though a leader and co-founder of Jammu and Kashmir National Liberation Front – Maqbool Butt transcended party lines and even history. He has turned into an eternal hero for the people of Kashmir. This aspect is non-destructible. In his struggle with

India, Maqbool Butt has been the winner, because what he could not achieve politically while alive, he has achieved in death. He has made a state, claiming liberal democracy as its political rationale, seem guilty of committing grave injustices.

Maqbool Butt was born in Trehgam village of district Kupwara in 1938. Although from a peasant family, he was well-qualified. He crossed the LoC in the 1950s. In 1962, he formed the Kashmir Liberation Committee to lobby with the 'Azad Kashmir' government. He tried to assume an active position vis-à-vis the liberation of Kashmir. He merged the Kashmir Liberation Committee into the Plebiscite Front (Azad Chapter) in 1965 and became its general secretary. When the Indo-Pak War of 1965 was at its peak, he co-founded the National Liberation Front in August 1965. It is said that he was inspired by the Algerian liberation struggle against French colonialism. He advocated the Algerian method of armed struggle. Later he was arrested in India-held Kashmir in 1968 but he escaped along with his two colleagues from Central Jail, Srinagar.

Maqbool Butt advocated complete independence for Jammu and Kashmir, so he was not favoured by Islamabad. Rather, he suffered even there. He crossed over to India again in 1976 to prepare for a guerrilla war but was arrested in the same year. Charged with murder, he was sentenced to death and was executed on 11 February 1984.

It is interesting to note that Maqbool Butt's whole family has sacrificed for the cause. One of his brothers disappeared outside the state in mysterious circumstances while he was in search of legal aid for Maqbool. His second brother, a key figure in the 1988-89 armed struggle, was killed in a road accident in Srinagar. A third brother got killed in his native village in an encounter with the army. Yet another one was released from jail a few months ago. Other family members come with their own stories of sacrifice; his is a household of warriors.

Maqbool Butt has not been forgotten by the people. It seems to them that he is still in jail challenging the mighty Indian state, posing a titanic moral dilemma for authorities. To date, he is a symbol for his oppressed people.

¹ Ahmad, Eqbal, *Confronting Empire: Interviews with David Barsamian* (USA: South End Press, 2000), p 31.

‘I am not Indian; I am Kashmiri’



S M Zaffar, March 2012

In the summer of 2008, I got a phone call from my cousin who lives in Delhi. He told me that I had secured admission in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). After two weeks of wrestling with a dilemma, I finally decided to join the university in a language course. It took me a while to come to terms with my decision as my first choice was not language but engineering. In fact, I believe half the Kashmiri youth opt for engineering after senior secondary school.

I landed in JNU in the July of 2008. I had mixed feelings. On the one hand, it seemed that I had escaped a prison of limited opportunity. I had left a land where a student had few career options, where medicine or engineering were the only potential choices, where those pursuing the humanities were looked down upon, and where a boy without a government job was considered unemployed. So yes, I was happy to join the university in Delhi.

However, I was also sad, for I missed my family. I missed my homeland. I missed the smell of fresh air that the cool breezes of my homeland always brought along. I missed the early morning dewdrops on the lush green grass that sparkled with the early rays of the sun. I missed the changing colours of seasons.

When I reached JNU, spring was on its way to Kashmir. Leaves and flower buds were sprouting all around. Carpets of grass were swelling in every direction. The whole of Kashmir was turning green, leaving behind the dark harshness of winter.

In Delhi, nature lacks variety. One can hardly differentiate between seasons. Every month seems to be the same. Leaves don't change colour, even the sky appears colourless, and the stars refuse to twinkle and shine

bright. The chirping of birds is replaced by the horns of motors and the landing of planes. There is pollution all around.

Delhi's weather remains hot and humid for most of the year. Scorching summers and bursts of hot air, called *loo*, are things I hate most about the city. Delhi's culture and society are also quite different, what with fast moving lives, weak family ties and late night work-shifts. People don't take noon chai and lavasa in the morning. They eat bread and butter with sugar-tea. They don't know what *nadir monji* is, or *halwi parath*, or *harrsi* and *Kashmiri wazwaan*.

Delhi has other things to offer though. It gave me the freedom to study any subject I liked, and treated all specialisations with the same respect as medicine or engineering. Besides, there were international book fairs and education fairs all round the year; offers of scholarships from across the world; workshops and conferences of all kinds happening in different parts of the city. Delhi was a pool of opportunities and inspiring stories. But all this came at the cost of a cool summer and pleasant weather.

Delhi claims Kashmir as an integral part of India. But I feel like a foreigner in India. I am not Indian; I am Kashmiri. Even Indians treat us as foreigners. And I, as a Kashmiri, accept being treated as such. Maybe it's our complexion, that it bears a resemblance to Central Asian skin, rather than Indian. Either way, we feel like outsiders.

I recall auto-rickshaw men calling me Iraqi and Afghani. I remember Indian students pasting the Indian flag on my door on Indian Independence Day; they didn't view Kashmiris as Indians, but tried to forcefully convert those of us on campus. I also recall the semi-finals of the last cricket World Cup when India beat Pakistan. The students in my hostel came with drums outside my room to cherish India's imminent victory; they shouted, hooted and threw beer glasses at me as if I were from Pakistan.

Being Kashmiri in Delhi has certain disadvantages. People always look towards you with distrust. I remember, when I was seeking a hotel on the eve of Republic Day, I was not given any accommodation even though the rooms were vacant. There are landlords who don't rent their apartments to Kashmiris.

But I don't blame common Delhiites. For, whenever anything wrong happens in this metro Kashmiris are the first suspects. The Delhi police have been known to arrest Kashmiris in false cases; there are so many people from my land languishing in Indian jails on grounds of mere

suspicion. In 2008, when media channels flashed the news report that the Lashkar-e-Toiba could be behind the Mumbai blasts, I had to confine myself to my room. My parents were worried; I believe every Kashmiri's parent gets perturbed when India's security is in any way jeopardised.

It seems laws like POTA, PSA, AFSPA has been specially framed for Kashmiris. Protests happen in every corner of India. I don't see protesters being fired upon; I don't see the death toll crossing hundreds; I don't see culprits roaming free. Such things only happen in Kashmir.

I too have protested against human rights violations. But luckily I have not been hit by a bullet. Maybe it's because I don't live in Kashmir. Maybe it's because living in Delhi suggests that I accept Indian hegemony. Or maybe it's because the media covers stories in Delhi. Still, my parents call me every day because they fear that I might be booked by the police in some false case or I may be forcibly disappeared.

Overall, I have been lucky. Being in JNU gave me a little security. I protested, but I was not booked. Moreover, we conducted movie screenings, public talks and conferences on the Kashmir issue in JNU; student political parties supported us; they raised slogans against human rights violations in Kashmir with us. Perhaps this approach of student unions in Delhi has made the government of India ban student bodies in Kashmir. They fear the educated class of society.

I pray for the day when a youth from Kashmir doesn't have to come to Delhi and adjust to its fast moving life in order to gain an education. I hope the education system within Kashmir grows so strong that students like me do not need to leave their homeland.

Everything I Cannot Tell You About The Women Of Kashmir



Nitasha Kaul, December 2011

What can I tell you about the women of Kashmir?

You, who read this, will already have a procession of images in your head.

Maybe you will think of the famous women poets, sages and mystics of Kashmir: of Lal Ded and Habba Khatoon, of Arnimal, of Rupa Bhawani. Their memory lives in their verses, born out of love and suffering. Renouncing the entrapments of convention, these women seekers have marked their words in the hills and shrines of Kashmir, and in the hearts of Kashmiris.

Maybe you will think of the women rulers of Kashmir, from a thousand to some hundred years ago: of Queen Didda, of Kota Rani. Women who led extraordinary lives, wielding power and making rules.

But these are the epic women of history books.

Perhaps you have visited Kashmir on a honeymoon or as a tourist, maybe you have seen famous Bollywood movies like *Kashmir Ki Kali* (the flower-bud of Kashmir), or more recent ones like *Mission Kashmir*. In this case, you will associate women and Kashmir with beauty, with heroines like Sharmila Tagore, Saira Banu, or Preity Zinta who played charming Kashmiri women on screen. Clad in pherans, wearing beautiful jewellery, carrying flowers, singing songs, and dancing on shikaras, these characters represent a desirable, innocent, irresistible beauty that stands for the appeal of 'Kashmir' as a place in the romantic imagination. This rosy-cheeked and fair beauty stereotype of Kashmiri women is one reason why many heroines in Indian cinema claim, or have, a connection to Kashmir.

But these are the wonderful women of the silver screen.

You may be someone who cannot help but see the women of Kashmir for who they are: the women in Kashmir. The women academics, doctors, artists, politicians, activists; the women who strive to progress in their chosen fields; the ones who work alongside men to address other people's problems through their work; the women fighters of Kashmir who have held guns and fought alongside the men in the struggles of the early 1930s; the girls who have pelted stones against injustice in the more recent uprisings of 2008 and 2010.

You must know that the women of Kashmir today are also the victims of mass rapes in villages whose names have become shorthand for uninvestigated crimes. The women of Kashmir are the tens of thousands of widows and half-widows; wives of killed and disappeared men; as well as mothers and grandmothers of missing children. Vulnerable, often impoverished, the sorrows, struggles and humiliation of these women of Kashmir are a catalogue of charges against the occupation of Kashmir.

What can I tell you of the women of Kashmir? You, who can pick up the kingly threads of antiquity in Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, and open the chapters titled 'Women of Kashmir' in the thick volumes of country and people surveys written by European administrators, scholars and explorers in earlier days and by Indian pedants in more recent times? These chapters narrate the gathered facts in a 'life of the natives' style, and contain a survey of what the women wore, and how their births or marriages were celebrated.

I have no such claim to encyclopaedism. I represent only my memory. I am a woman. I am Kashmiri.

So let me tell you about an ancestor of mine, Dedi, the oldest real-life Kashmiri woman that I know of, but have never met, and who is forever stored as an image in this one photograph that comes to my mind when I think of the women of Kashmir.

Today, it is a quiet wintry evening in the corner room of a big city. I am an entire continent away from Srinagar. Kashmir is on my mind.

I climb up a large table to reach for a blue plastic bag which is carefully stowed away in a ceiling locker. A broken bone in my arm, I wince with some pain as I lift the torn dog-eared albums out of the bag stuffed with faded black and white pictures and find the one I am looking for.

As I said, I haven't seen Dedi in real life; we are separated by almost a century. I hold her image in view, peering at her, trying to glean something more from the only picture that exists of her face. In my recollection, she is always old, always toothless, and always with a utensil. It is a strange pose to be photographed in.



I am struck by the difference between Fred Bremner's well-known early 20th century photograph of 'A Punditani (Hindu) Kashmir',¹ and the portrait of Dedi. Both the pictures date back to a similar era. The imperial British photograph has a rather well-dressed woman, her gaze averted from the viewer, reclining in a regal pose with her *dezhors* (hanging ear ornaments) in clear view. Dedi, on the other hand, is barefoot, looking at the lens, gripping a large metal utensil with both her hands. Of course, we know that 'the typical', 'the average', 'the ideal type' and 'the characteristic' are very different epistemological categories. What a subaltern flesh and blood Kashmiri Pandit woman was, in terms of her looks and her life, is often not the stereotyped image handed down to us through the grand narrative of official history; in other words, representation is also politics.

Dedi's photograph is undated. In those days, nobody remembered the calendar date or the numerical year when someone was born in Kashmir. Events like births, marriages, and deaths were recalled by older women who had an elephant's memory; if asked about when something happened, they would think aloud and conjecture on the basis of what happened around that

time, was it after or before some other event or something else that had happened to another.

This subjective time-keeping of these older women of Kashmir is related to the fabulous and peculiar way in which memory functioned in their universe. An elderly woman from Srinagar, a relative, who came to Delhi in the late 1980s/early 1990s and still lives in a mythic, if unchallenged, Kashmir that she has always carried around her – what she eats, how she dresses, the specific strong accent of her old style Kashmiri speech – has a sense of time that allows her to recall the specifics of *chillai kalaan* (the harsh winter period) and each detail of daily life in old Kashmir including every in/auspicious marking of the lunar calendar.

One day, as she sat on the charpoy in the balcony, taking in the afternoon sun in Delhi in December, I listened to this relative tell me about her Kashmir. She sang old Kashmiri songs with my grandmother, songs which mean little to the generations after them. Being semi-literate at best, they have a treasure of folk wisdom and oral memory that will die with them. The nostalgia of these old women of Kashmir, who have not lived there for a time now, is of a specific texture – it is a quotidian yearning for a way of life, a smell of bread, a kind of cooking pot, a change of the seasons, a form of the family, a community, a familiarity. In a certain sense, one might call it a ‘feminine nostalgia’. When I asked these old women keepers of bygone Kashmiri memory the political question of what they thought had happened to Kashmir, to the idea of Kashmir, their answer was one flat word: *trath*. A thunderbolt curse had fallen on Kashmir. That was all.

I did not grow up in Kashmir. I grew up in Kashmir.

Kashmir is a place etched in my imagination, every morning and evening, by the stories, artefacts and rituals that surround me.

Melancholic nostalgia for a never forever homeland is an awkward inheritance for a young girl. Yet, this is exactly what my forbears bequeathed me. My grandfather left Srinagar for Lahore; my father left Srinagar for Simla; both ended up in Delhi eventually. These men, now dead, whom I loved immeasurably (if only because their love towards me was absolutely unconditional; I simply had to be, in order to be loved), and who did not see eye to eye on many things, never let me feel that Kashmir was anywhere ‘away’. They had ‘left’ Kashmir (there were several other relatives who ‘had to leave’ Kashmir) and like most in exile, Kashmir was central to their words, thoughts, memories, and dreams.

I heard stories: for every season, with every meal, at every festival, every time there was a power blackout, every night that I couldn't sleep. These stories mapped a city that I physically remembered from very early childhood (and later went to as an adult), and what always stood out for me from among the 'Srinagar tales' I'd hear (which comprised of family relations, historical background, political incidents, local legends, folk beliefs, and other miscellanea of baked breads and mischief), was this one great-grandmother woman figure: Dedi.

My mother was pregnant twice after giving birth to me; she miscarried once, and the second time my sister was born. I was excited to have the girl sibling I had been praying for, but also interested to hear that she may be Dedi reincarnated (Dedi had promised that she would be reborn as a daughter in the family). Many Kashmiris would have thought us crazy, of course, to wish for a girl. Preference for the male child is quite a universal norm; moreover, there are specific customs that associate women with ill luck. It is, for example, seen as inauspicious to begin a journey or go out if there is a woman coming from the opposite direction (the *Zanaan Zang*).

As children we would recite the names of our ancestors, saying them in a sing-song tone like they were a multiplication table we were learning: So-and-so's father was so-and-so. I would pause, in the manner of stubborn children, and ask my grandfather why we didn't know any women. Who were these men's wives? What families did they come from? What about their siblings? Well, the fact was that social memories followed patrilineal norms. The names of male ancestors went back seven generations. If you took the women into account, I would know two generations, plus Dedi, because she was special.

I do know that the first adjective used about her was always 'pious'. She went to the Hari Parbat to pray every morning, fasted frequently, coped with the demands of a 40-person joint family household and a difficult husband. She awoke well before dawn, took a dip in the river, cooked and cleaned, sewed, stitched, and embroidered, and unfailingly sacrificed for others. Steadfast to routine, in spite of age and infirmity, she insisted on fasting and going to the river, and caught her death from pneumonia.

Memory is not a tabula rasa; it is an active amalgam of sensation, experience, hearing and retelling. So I cannot be sure what part of my memories about Dedi belongs to her son, and what to her grandson.

But one image always stands apart. It is a long-ago time. In the kitchen of a large carved wooden house near a river in Srinagar, there is a row of men and boys sitting down to dinner on the ground with their backs to the wall. They have their plates directly in front of them, and each can observe the extra helpings of others. They are all served meat over the rice. The patriarch of the house will not tolerate any leniency or favours to the children. Dedi's favourite child – son? grandson? – often finds that there is the secret treat of extra meat carefully hidden under the mound serving of rice on the metal plate. Having little resources of her own, this small generosity, a gesture of love, is all that Dedi could offer on some days.

I really cannot tell you anything about the women of Kashmir.

¹ Photo insert by Fred Bremner, in Wikipedia <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Panditani.jpg>> [accessed 24 March 2013].

Notes on the Contributors



Ather Zia is an anthropologist. She works on militarisation, human rights and gender in Kashmir. Formerly a journalist, Ather is also a poet, short story writer, essayist, and activist. She edits an online journal, *Kashmir Lit* and is currently based in the University of California, Irvine.

Atta Mohammad is a gravedigger from North Kashmir who has buried more than 235 unknown bodies in unmarked graves (of which some were mass graves) in a burial ground close to his house.

Caelainn Hogan is an Irish freelance journalist who has reported from South Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Spain and Lebanon on issues ranging from refugee crises to LGBT rights. Her work has appeared in *The Irish Times* and *The Sunday Times*, among others.

David Barsamian is the award-winning founder and director of *Alternative Radio*, the independent weekly audio series based in Boulder, Colorado. He is the winner of the Media Education Award, ACLU's Upton Sinclair Award for Independent Journalism, and is a recipient of the Cultural Freedom Fellowship from the Lannan Foundation. The Institute for Alternative Journalism named him one of its top 10 media heroes. Barsamian has also written prolifically in conjunction with Noam Chomsky, Tariq Ali, Howard Zinn, Arundhati Roy and others. His most recent titles include *Occupy the Economy: Challenging Capitalism* with Richard Wolff and a reissue of the Chomsky classic, *How the World Works*. His best-selling books with Chomsky have been translated into multiple languages.

Fahad Shah is a journalist reporting on Kashmir, and is the founder-editor of *The Kashmir Walla* magazine.

Farrukh Faheem was born and brought up in Kashmir and teaches at the South Asia Centre for Peace, Conflict and Human Security, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. He also taught in the Universities of Delhi and Kashmir. He passionately follows developments in Kashmir and is engaged in understanding the nature of mobilisations that informed the early 1990s uprising in Kashmir.

Freny Manecksha is an independent journalist from Mumbai with 20 years of experience. She is interested in development issues and human rights.

Gautam Navlakha is a writer and democratic rights activist. He is the former editorial consultant for *The Economic and Political Weekly*.

Hashim is a stone thrower in Kashmir. (Further details withheld.)

Mazhar Iqbal is a peace and human rights campaigner from Rawalakot. He is currently living in the UK and casually writes on issues of peace, security, human rights and civil liberties in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. He is associated with Press for Peace (PFP).

MC Kash is a resistance rapper from Kashmir. A lyrical storyteller, he was first spotted for his famous *I Protest* track which came out during the 2010 mass uprising in Kashmir. Since then he has released two albums, *Rebel Reubublik* and *Liberation: A Tribute to Shaheed Maqbool Butt*.

Mohamad Junaid is a doctoral student in anthropology at The Graduate Center, City University of New York. He grew up in Kashmir.

Mridu Rai teaches South Asian History at Trinity College, Dublin. She is the author of *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights and the History of Kashmir*, which examines the 19th and 20th century foundations of the deprivation of the rights of various groups of Kashmiris under the aegis of British imperial governance. Her new work seeks to examine the post-1947 history of Kashmir under the control of the Indian state.

Nitasha Kaul is a London-based academic, public intellectual, media commentator and a writer of fiction and verse. Her scholarly monograph *Imagining Economics Otherwise* (Routledge, 2007/2008) was followed by a novel titled *Residue*, on Kashmiris outside of Kashmir, which was shortlisted for the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2009. She has published widely and addressed diverse audiences on the themes of identity, democracy, creativity, and political economy.

P G Rasool is a Kashmiri writer and has been writing columns for local publications for the last 20 years. He is the author of *Kashmir 1947*, published in Urdu.

Saima Bhat studied journalism from the Islamic University of Science and Technology, Kashmir. She has worked for *BBC Radio* and *The Kashmir Walla* in Kashmir. Currently she is a reporter with *Kashmir Life*, a weekly newspaper.

Sameer Yasir is a writer and an academic. He writes on defence, human rights and security issues and has to his name numerous articles, features, book chapters, and essays. He taught for three years at the Centre for International Peace and Conflict Studies in Kashmir. He has also worked as the deputy communication chief for the Information and Resource Centre, Singapore. He has a BA and an MA in International Relations.

Shahnaz Bashir was born, brought up and educated in Kashmir. He is a gold medallist from Kashmir University. He was honoured with the Shameem Ahmad Shameem Memorial, Kashmir Times Foundation Award in Media Studies in 2007. He worked as a sub-editor for one of the leading English dailies of Kashmir, and is now an assistant professor of media studies at the Central University of Kashmir, Srinagar. His work of fiction is forthcoming.

Sheikh Saleem was born in Kashmir. He studied journalism in the University of Kashmir, Srinagar. He has written for *The Indian Express* and *The Kashmir Walla* and now works as reporter for *Rising Kashmir*.

Sheikh Showkat Hussain is an associate professor of law in the Central University of Kashmir. Prior to joining the university he has taught in the University of Kashmir and the International Islamic University, Malaysia. He is a political analyst and human rights activist who contributes to the English media within Kashmir regularly. He has four books and scores of academic articles to his credit.

Showkat Nanda is an award-winning Kashmiri photojournalist and documentary photographer. He pursued his postgraduate degree from Kashmir University's Media Education Research Center (MERC) and began his career from AFP in Srinagar. He has worked for several national and international media organisations as a writer and photographer, has taught photography as visiting faculty, and won the National Press Photo Award, the most prestigious photojournalism award in India, in 2011. Until recently he worked as the assistant editor of a Srinagar-based weekly, and has now been awarded the prestigious Fulbright Fellowship to the Missouri Graduate School of Journalism in Columbia, United States where he is pursuing a specialisation in documentary photojournalism.

Shubh Mathur is an anthropologist whose interests include human rights, nations and borders, the death penalty, minorities, immigration and Muslim communities in the United States. Her first book, *The Everyday Life of Hindu Nationalism* was published by the Three Essays Collective Press.

Siddhartha Gigoo is the author of the novel *The Garden of Solitude*. He has written two anthologies of poetry, *Fall and Other Poems* and *Reflections*. His short film *The Last Day* will be released in 2013. A collection of his short stories will be published in the same year.

S M Zaffar is a student at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. His column published in this collection was the most read on *The Kashmir Walla* website in 2012.

Uzma Falak was born in Srinagar. She studied mass communication in AJK MCRC, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Besides writing for various Kashmir-based publications, she blogs for *New Internationalist*, London. She explores memory through art and poetry, and has a deep interest in the interaction of memorabilia and objects with space and time.

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And J.

The verses that open the introduction are taken from Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poem 'Bol', translated by Shiv K Kumar into English under the title

‘Speak Up’, *Selected Poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz* (India: Viking, 1995). The extract used to open the segment *Memoirs* is taken from Agha Shahid Ali’s prose poem, ‘Dear Shahid’, *The Country Without a Post Office* (USA: Norton & Company, 1998). The quote under the segment *Longing* is taken from an interview of Mughli, a Kashmiri, also the mother of Nazir Ahmad Teli, a school teacher, who disappeared in 1990 after he was picked up by the Indian forces, never to return. Mughli passed away in October 2009, longing for her son’s homecoming. The interview was published in *The Indian Express* on 4 February 2007. Quoted at the start of the segment, *Resistance* is Maqbool Butt’s statement before a Pakistani court during the Ganga hijacking case.

'I am here demanding a different life – a life where the land I belong to exists as a nation on the map of the world; where I do not live and die with an uncertain identity. A life where there are no barriers, no checkpoints and no barriers of coiled razor wires; where I am not greeted by gun-wielding soldiers on my way to school; where my parents are not humiliated every day; where my tiffin box and school bag are not searched for weapons; where I am not killed in a playground with a cricket ball still in my hand; and where I am not thrown into the shadows of despair and frustration.'

Kashmir, once eulogised by emperors and poets as a land of unparalleled beauty, has today mutated into a deeply troubled space. The post-Partition territorial disputes between India and Pakistan, and the armed freedom movements of 1989 and after, have exposed the Valley to widespread insurgency, and one of the bloodiest, most repressive military occupations in the world; there are more men in uniform and guns in Kashmir than in all of Kabul or Benghazi.

However, beyond the facts of political breakdown, there is a landscape that is deeply personal. *Of Occupation and Resistance* recognises this, by collating the stories of Kashmiris living under state oppression – of a schoolgirl coping with the threat of daily 'crackdowns'; of a gravedigger burying the bodies of maimed youth; of a grief-stricken boy protesting with his music; of a distressed photojournalist joining stone throwers; or a mother waiting for her son to return from his enforced disappearance.

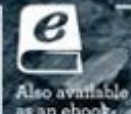
Through these accounts of mislaid childhoods and continuous oppression, what emerges most powerfully is the primacy of memory – its capacity to record, enrich, suppress or erase; to gift a fierce world with meaning; to build new lives. Most of all, the narratives remind us that the acts of telling and re-telling, of recalling and forgetting – these are the most potent forms of protest.

Against the rallying cries of *azadi*, and the calls for freedom and justice, *Of Occupation and Resistance* has a significant voice and place. For, it acts as a map – a guide to those analysing the fraught terrain of Kashmir.



Anthology/ Non-fiction

Cover photo by Shahid Tantray
Author photo by Muhabit ul Haq
Cover design by Ahlawat Gunjan



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